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# Introduction

The purpose of this book is to act as a guide for the primary school teacher who is a non-specialist RE teacher and for those who are more experienced but still find the subject hard to teach. This is particularly important at a time when training places for RE have been reduced.

Many Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) leave college having had a minimum number of teaching sessions on RE and so might not feel very well-equipped on a subject that requires not only an extensive body of knowledge, but good understanding of sensitivities and pitfalls, and the ways in which children's religious beliefs and practises can lead to misunderstandings or upsets. It is therefore crucial for the RE teacher to also foster tolerance, acceptance and respect.

## The aims of the book

The book covers the basic facts about each of the **six world religions** which are mentioned in the **Education Reform Act 1988**, namely, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.

It also addresses some of the issues within these religions, for example diversity, that may be met, which will help to avoid stereotyping and also contribute positively to the community cohesion agenda.

However, it also contains brief sections on other religions that are not named in the act; as well as some religious groups that have their roots in Christianity but do not assent to the orthodox teachings of Christianity.

This is an acknowledgement that schools may include pupils from these families and may choose to include a study of these religions in their RE classes, especially where reference is made to them in the local agreed syllabus or as part of a study of the religious makeup of the local community.

## What the book does not do

This book does not explore religious education pedagogies or methodologies, tell you how to teach or teach you everything about all religions and life stances! The reader will need to go on to further research for more detailed knowledge about the religions or to other books for different methodologies and how to apply the knowledge to the classroom. A short bibliography is included to direct the reader to other relevant texts. Having said this, teachers are reminded that enquiry-based learning is an effective methodology, and that assessment for learning should be built into your lesson plans.

## How to use this book

The book is set out by the six major religions specified in the Education Reform Act 1988, in alphabetical order with the additional religions added after Sikhism. Within each religion, key areas are identified for easy reference. There is also an index at the end of the book to enable the reader to search for particular themes or concepts. Whilst it is unlikely that a teacher will read through the whole book in one go, it is recommended that he or she at least reads through the whole chapter on a particular religion first before selecting parts of chapters. In this way an overview of the religion should be apparent and this will hopefully avoid some of the misconceptions or inaccuracies which may arise from a partial reading of the material, taken out of context. 'Talking points' for discussion are included in each chapter.

### The key areas covered are:

- Origins, founders and leaders
- Beliefs about God, the world, creation and humankind
- Festivals and celebrations
- Religious practices: prayer and worship
- Places of worship
- Community
- Pilgrimage and sites of particular significance
- Rites of passage
- Moral codes
- Key artefacts
- Key stories
- Diversity within the faith.

## The statutory context of Religious Education in England and Wales

The religious education curriculum in England and Wales is determined locally. Religious Education was made a statutory subject in the 1944 Education Act and in those days it was assumed that it would take the form of teaching about Christianity alone and went under the name of Religious Instruction.



## Origins, founders and leaders

**Buddhism** had its origins in the Nepalese 'Hindu' culture. It takes its name from its key figure: the Buddha, a title meaning 'the enlightened one'. The name of the Buddha was actually **Siddattha Gotama**, Siddattha being his personal name and Gotama being the family name. His family came from the **Kshatriya** or ruling caste, the second of the four major classes in the Hindu caste system (see pages 49-50).

It is difficult to decipher exactly what is fact and what is fiction from the stories we have of the Buddha's life and teaching. An account of his life can be found in the **Buddhacarita** or Acts of the Buddha but it was not written until the first century CE, some five hundred years after the events it was describing, and by that time the original facts had been augmented. The suggested date of his birth is around 566–563 BCE.

### The birth of Siddattha

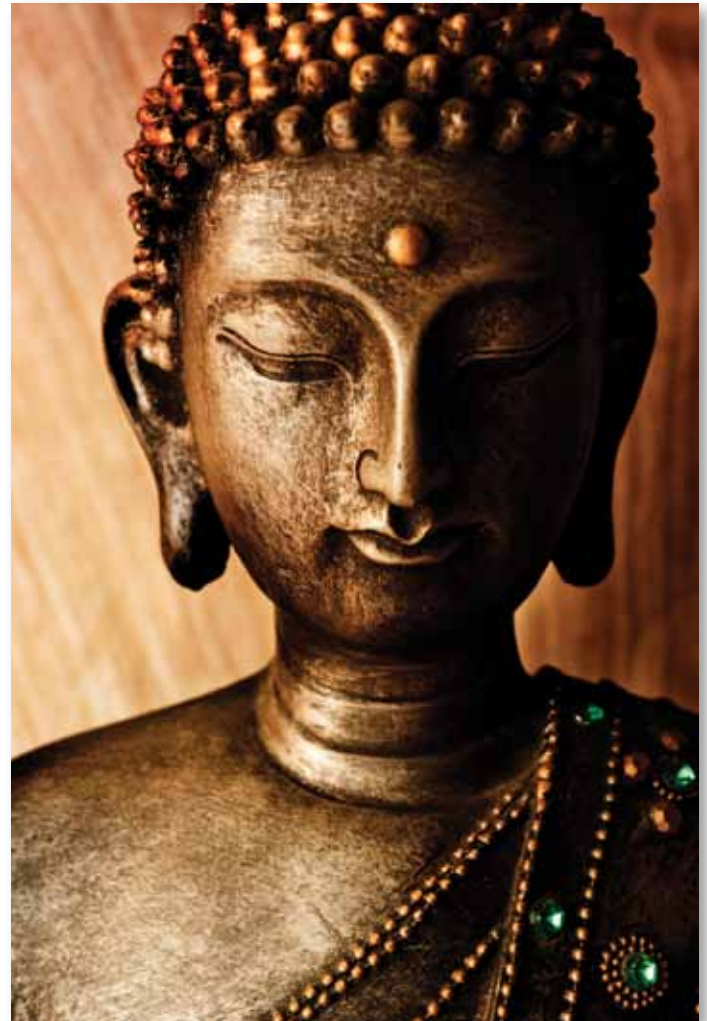
The stories of Siddattha's birth include accounts of miracles. At his conception it is said that his mother Maya dreamed that a baby white elephant pierced her right side, indicating that he would be either a great king or a wise religious teacher.

Just before his birth his mother went to visit her family, as was customary at the time, but went into premature labour in the Lumbini Gardens in the Terai lowlands in Nepal at the foothills of the Himalayan mountains. It is said that she delivered him standing, leaning against a tree and was received by the gods Indra and Brahma. The newly-born infant then took seven steps, declaring that this would be the last time he would be reborn. His mother died seven days after giving birth and he was raised by an aunt.

Siddattha's father, Suddhodana, ruler of the Sakya clan, was aware of the prophecy regarding his son and, fearful that he might become a religious leader rather than a great King, he made sure his son was surrounded by luxury and wealth. The young Siddattha possessed three palaces, one for each season, and knew nothing of poverty or disease. At sixteen he married Yashodhara and she gave him a son, Rahula, whose name means 'fetter'.

### Quest for enlightenment

The story of how Siddattha discovered the four signs – which were to lead him to leave home and set out on his quest for enlightenment – may be just that: a story. Be it fact or fiction, what it claims is that Siddattha grew tired of his life of luxury and wanted to see what the world outside was like. He set



Sculpture of Buddha

out on several forays with his charioteer Channa and his horse Kanthaka. On these trips they saw a sick man, an old man, a corpse and an ascetic. Siddattha came to realise that there was illness and suffering in the world and he wanted to discover for himself the cause of this. So, at the age of twenty nine, he turned his back on his family and riches to go in search of the meaning of suffering. He also left behind his horse Kanthaka, who died from sadness at the loss of his master.

At first Siddattha tried the way of the ascetic. He cut his hair, ate almost nothing and tried meditation practices. It is said that he became so thin that it was possible to see his spine through his stomach. Finally, he concluded that this was not the way to find the answer, so he abandoned the life of the ascetic, started eating properly again and resolved to meditate until he found the answer. At this point, his five friends who had joined him in his search, became disillusioned with him and deserted him. Left alone, he sat under a Bodhi tree (*figus religiosa*) meditating and being tempted by the archdemon Mara, the deceiver. He touched his hand to the earth, calling



it to witness that this place was now his and an earthquake followed to confirm this. So Siddattha stayed there until he gained enlightenment and became The Buddha. He was 35-years-old.

The place where this happened was Bodh Gaya which has become a Buddhist place of pilgrimage.

Initially the Buddha was happy to remain where he was, but after seven weeks he felt he should share his findings with others and so left for the city of Benares, modern day Varanasi, where he preached his first sermon in the Deer Park at Sarnath. The five ascetics who had left him when he renounced the harsh ascetic practices, joined him again and became his first followers or bhikkus. They also attained enlightenment on hearing the Buddha's second sermon and from then on became arahat, somewhat akin to saints. These were people who had gained enlightenment, but continued in their present life helping others before finally reaching nibbana (meaning 'blown out'). These five bhikkus, together with the Buddha, founded the **Sangha** or monastic community.

Buddha spent the rest of his life teaching; travelling on foot throughout north east India. At the age of 80 and in poor health, he died, lying on his right side. At his death he is said to have achieved **Parinibbana**, total extinction. His body was cremated and the remains are buried in a stupa (burial mound). It is said his last words were: "*Decay is inherent in all things; be sure to strive (for nibbana) with clarity of mind.*"

## Talking points:

- Find out more about the life of the Buddha.
- Tell the story of the Buddha using a Buddharupa, a Buddha doll or a variety of different images.
- Tell some of the stories about the Buddha e.g. Prince Siddattha and the wounded swan. What do they tell us about the sort of person he was?

## Beliefs about the world, creation and humankind

### Cycle of death and rebirth

To understand the Buddha's teachings, it is useful to know something of the world in which he grew up. The prevailing religion in India at that time was Hinduism, which taught that all beings were subject to a cycle of death and rebirth, called **samsara**. Each rebirth was affected by what the individual thought, did or said in this life, the law of **karma**, a law of cause and effect. Humans sought to be free of this constant cycle by achieving moksha or liberation from rebirth.

The Buddha also believed that life was a cycle of death and rebirth and the aim of the individual was to break out of the cycle and achieve nibbana. Unlike Hinduism, however,

## Key Facts and Figures: Buddhism

<i>Date of origin</i>	6-5th century BCE
<i>Key figure</i>	Siddattha Gotama (The Buddha)
<i>Key beliefs and teachings</i>	Four Noble Truths
<i>Place of worship or special place</i>	Vihara
<i>Places of pilgrimage</i>	Lumbini; Bodh Gaya; Sarnath; Kusinara
<i>Sacred writings</i>	Pali Canon (tripitaka)
<i>Key artefacts</i>	Buddharupas, offering bowls
<i>2001 Census in England and Wales</i>	144,453/52,041,916 people (0.28% population)
<i>2011 Census in England and Wales</i>	247,743/56,075,912 people (0.4% population)



Buddhism has no doctrine of a God and so there is no requirement for a sacrificial system. It also rejected the Hindu caste system.

In his first sermon at the Deer Park in Sarnath, the Buddha gave his followers an insight into the cause of this cycle of death and rebirth and expounded a way to achieve enlightenment. This was recorded in a 'sutta' (discourse) known as "The setting in motion the wheel of Dhamma" and it contains the basic teachings of Buddhism summarised in the **Four Noble Truths**:

- All life is suffering (dukkha). This suffering is not just pain but an unsatisfactory state; the opposite of welfare and wellbeing.
- Suffering is caused by desire or craving; greed and selfishness.
- It follows that to eliminate suffering one must eliminate this desire or craving.
- The way to achieve this is to follow the Noble Eightfold Path (magga).

After the Buddha's experience of the ascetic path, he came to realise that this way was no more successful in gaining nibbana than his previous life of luxury. So the Noble Eightfold Path outlined a Middle Way that was accessible to everyone. It can be subdivided into three sections.

## The Noble Eightfold Path

See table opposite.

## Skandhas (Khandhas)

Another way in which Buddhism differs from Hinduism is in its belief about the self. Hinduism teaches that it is the soul or atman which is reborn in the cycle of death and rebirth.

Buddhism, on the other hand, teaches that there is no self or soul (anatta). Instead it teaches that everything is impermanent and humans are made up of a bundle of five tendencies or forces known as **skandhas**. These are: form (of the body), feelings, perceptions, emotions and consciousnesses. They are all subject to change, are impermanent (anicca) and are kept in being by desire.

One aim of the Buddhist is to achieve continually better rebirths until finally it is possible to gain nibbana (literally 'blown out') when there will be no more rebirths. At this stage the enlightened person becomes an arahat. As such

## The Noble Eightfold Path

<i>Right view</i>	This section is about knowledge or wisdom. It not enough just to do or think the right things. It is about directing one's thoughts and aims correctly.
<i>Right thought</i>	
<i>Right speech</i>	These three are about the moral or ethical dimension; how one behaves. It is a reminder that all actions have consequences. This is the law of kamma (karma) and by good living it is possible to create good kamma and so make progress towards nibbana. They are about reducing one's own and others' suffering.
<i>Right action</i>	
<i>Right livelihood</i>	
<i>Right effort</i>	The last three relate to spiritual discipline. Right effort is about being mindful of what one does, says and thinks in every aspect of life. Right mindfulness requires the individual to be self aware and finally right concentration requires the Buddhist to meditate in order to free the mind from attachment and thus to end desire and achieve nibbana.
<i>Right mindfulness</i>	
<i>Right concentration</i>	

he or she will continue living (see above) but will create no more kamma so that when he or she dies nibbana will be realised and there will be no more rebirths. Many Buddhists today also see it as a way to develop wisdom and compassion and to deepen morality.

## Five precepts

The five precepts provide guidance on the best way to live and elaborate on some of the stages in the Noble Eightfold Path and relate mainly to ethical behaviour. They are:

- Do not take life (for this reason many, though not all, Buddhists are vegetarians)
- Do not steal or take what is not given but be generous



Council has 349 member churches around the world. It states its central goal as the visible unity of the church, though acknowledges that this can be understood in various ways. In England, local churches work together to organise events and special services in loose organisations known as the Churches Together in England, formerly called the Council of Churches. There are also a number of LEPs (Local Ecumenical Partnerships) where two or more denominations worship together as a single church community or in a shared building under a formal agreement.

## Talking points:

- Compare the birth narratives of Jesus in Matthew and Luke's Gospels. How are they different?
- Look at the opening of Mark and John's Gospels. Why do you think there are no stories about Jesus' birth in them?

## Beliefs about God, the world, creation and humankind

As mentioned earlier, a traditional summary of what Christians believe can be found in the creed, from the Latin credo 'I believe'. There are in fact several creeds e.g. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, but they are similar in nature and content.

### The Nicene Creed in its twenty first century form:

*We believe in One God, the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.*

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God,*

*Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made,*

*of one Being with the Father.*

*Through Him all things were made.*

*For us, and for our salvation he came down from Heaven;*

*By the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.*

*For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;*

*He suffered death and was buried.*

*On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into Heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

*He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,*

*And his kingdom will have no end.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.*

*With the Father and Son he is worshipped and glorified.*

*He has spoken through the Prophets.*

*We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic church*

*We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins*

*We look for the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come.*

The majority of the creed deals with the nature of God and in this lies the paradox of Christian theology. God is One and yet exists in three forms as the Divine Creator, as the Saviour Son Jesus and as the unseen Holy Spirit. St Patrick, patron saint of Ireland, was to describe this in terms of the shamrock leaf: it is one leaf of the same substance but yet has three separate parts to it.

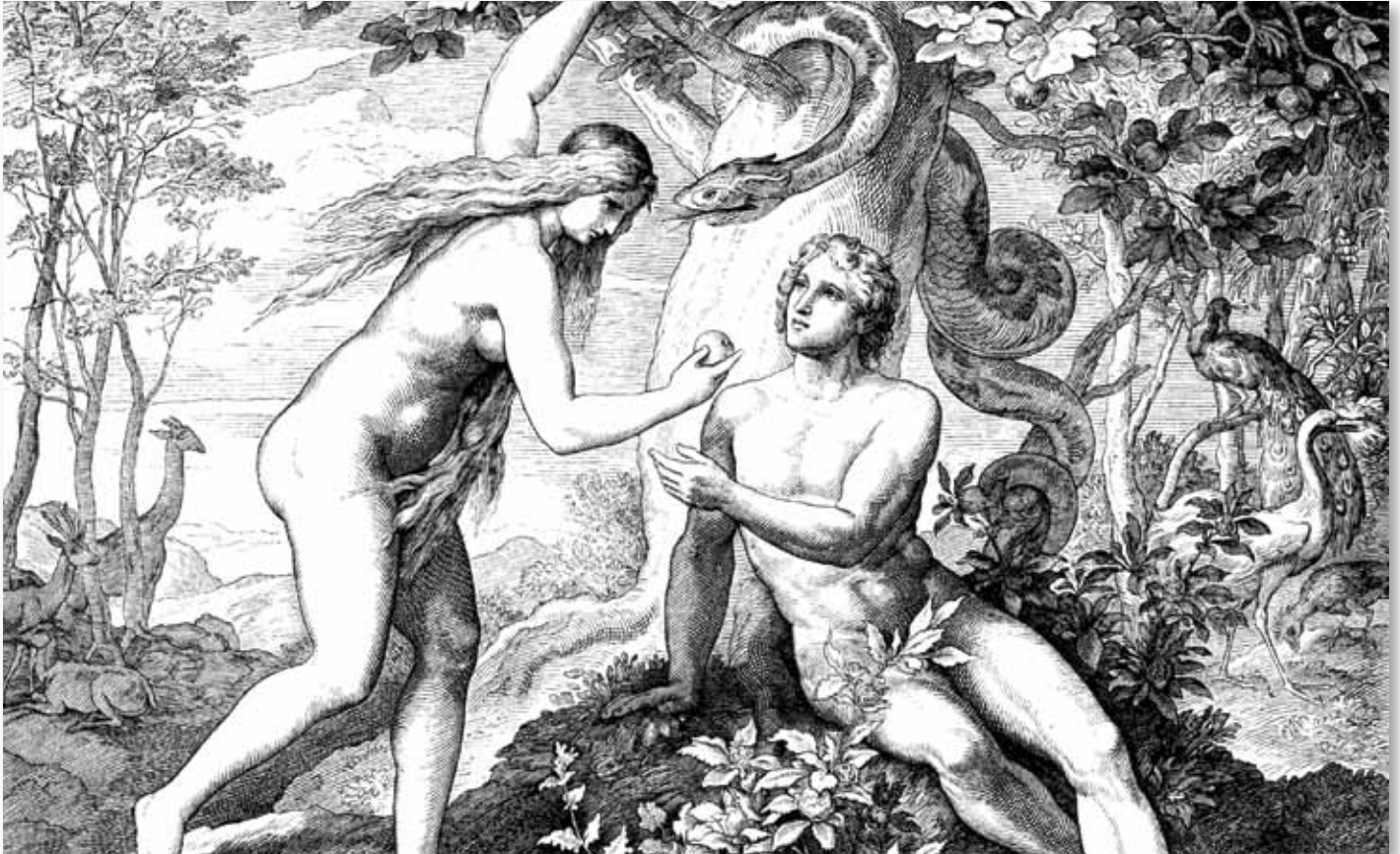
## Creation and 'original sin'

For Christians, God is talked of as omnipresent and omniscient. He existed before the world began and is the Creator of the world and everything in it. The story of creation is found in Genesis, at the beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures (**Old Testament**), a scripture that Christians share with the Jews where it is known as the **Tenakh** (see page 77).

Traditional Christianity teaches that the world was made good and that people were made in the image of God. But sin, that which separates humankind from God, mars the relationship between God and His creation, even from birth. This is the doctrine of 'original sin'. To save creation from sin and the death that inevitably follows it, God sent his Son, Jesus into the world to save it, a teaching that is summed up in John 3:16: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his Only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not die but have everlasting life*".

The creed then spells out how Jesus was born, not of an earthly father, but of the virgin Mary and this child was both fully human and fully divine, a further paradox. According to Christian belief, Jesus was put to death but rose from the dead three days later and was seen by a number of followers (up to 500 according to one account). By his death and resurrection, Jesus was able to reconcile humankind to God and make death a transition between this life and that eternal life lived in the presence of God.

The first century view was that sin separates humankind from God and is punishable by death. Therefore the God of first century Jewish beliefs needed to be appeased by



Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit

animal sacrifice, but because no-one was perfect, this sacrifice had to be repeated. Jesus, being fully God, was the perfect sacrifice and so his death provided an end to all sacrifice for sin. Moreover, in dying, he took the place of all sinful people and made them right with God. This reconciliation was made possible by the faith of the believer through God's grace – a doctrine expounded by St Paul as 'justification by faith'. (Although this concept of sacrifice is difficult in modern-day thought, Christians nevertheless today believe that in some mysterious way God intervened in human history to bring all mankind back to Himself.)

The third element of the One God is the Holy Spirit. This is the unseen presence of God as He works in the world. The story of the coming of the Holy Spirit is graphically described in the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles and the gift of the Holy Spirit is associated with confirmation, when a person takes on for him or herself the duties and responsibilities of a committed Christian; and at ordination, when a person becomes a priest.

The doctrine that there is One God, who is known through three different aspects or functions as God the Parent and Creator, God the Son who became human as Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit at work in the world, is called the

**Trinity.** Although this term does not appear as a finished theology in the New Testament (the Christian sacred scriptures) it is suggested, for example in the words of the grace that Paul uses when writing to the church in his second letter to the Corinthians and is now widely used by Christians in their services.

*"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."  
(2 Corinthians 13:14)*

## Festivals and celebrations

**Easter, Whitsun and Christmas** are the three major Christian festivals in the Church's year.

### Easter

Easter occurs in March or April and is the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is the most important Christian festival. The period leading up to the Sunday is called Lent and lasts for 40 days. It is a solemn time of study and reflection. In some traditions, such as the Catholic one, it is also a time for fasting, particularly