

our faith

South Cardiff Interfaith Network

2015

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INTRODUCTION

Interfaith Dialogue

We live in a world where faiths live cheek by jowl. This is increasingly evident throughout the world, but closer to home in Wales too, notably in places like Wrexham and the south part of Cardiff. In fact, Cardiff has been witness to a multi-faith scene ever since ‘Tiger Bay’ was established 150 years ago as a principal dock for international cargoes coming in and out of the United Kingdom. By the 1950s there were some 57 nationalities living in south Cardiff. With these different nationalities different faiths have also flourished.

Within this local tradition, the South Cardiff Interfaith Network seeks to build up good relationships between the mainstream faiths. Interfaith dialogue is seen as being important in today’s world, not least because it challenges the erroneous view that faith is a moribund concept, or worse still, that it is the root of violence and war. The truth is that religion can be manipulated by unwise leaders or political extremists for violent ends, as we have seen over the centuries and across the world today. The other truth is that religion, or perhaps better still faith, is founded on the hope that we aim to be peace-loving peoples. Interfaith dialogue is an art: the art of different faith groups talking to one other.

Interfaith dialogue is a way of becoming wiser about other cultures, within which faiths play an important and formative part.

There are a number of overlaps between the different faiths that are worth exploring: we look out for those who are poor and needy, we love our neighbours, and so on. Exploring the common ground of different faiths can help us to cooperate on matters of mutual concern as well as to see each other in a clearer light. Moreover, observing other faiths can help us to appreciate our own faith. It reassures us that we are all aiming to understand who we are and our role in the world. As we practise dialogue, we are keen to point out that we respect one another's integrity.

The South Cardiff Interfaith Network organises interfaith events that allow dialogue to develop, not just across tables in meeting rooms, but also practically in public spaces. We have visited one another's faith venues as well as arranged talks and discussions.

This booklet is another initiative. In it we aim not only to inform people of the uniqueness of each faith, but also to demonstrate that all the faiths we represent are striving for the same end: to be kinder and more compassionate human beings. With rich faith traditions in south Cardiff represented among people derived from the 'four corners of the earth', as a local historian describes it, we can learn a great deal from one another.

The essays that follow are brief introductions to seven of the world faiths: Bahá'í, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.

Rev. Dr. Mark Dimond

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

The Bahá'í Faith is a world religion with the purpose to unite all races and peoples. They are followers of Bahá'u'lláh who is believed to be the Promised One of all ages and the Great Spiritual Educator of this age; the Great Personage whose Teachings will enable humanity to build a new world.

The Bahá'í Faith sets out a vision of a united world community based on love and justice. It addresses such essential themes as:

- the oneness of God and religion
- the oneness of humanity and freedom from prejudice
- the inherent nobility of the human being
- the progressive revelation of religious truth
- the development of spiritual qualities
- the integration of worship and service
- the fundamental equality of the sexes
- the harmony between religion and science
- the centrality of justice to all human endeavors
- the elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty
- the importance of education

The Bahá'í Faith began in Persia/Iran with the mission entrusted by God to two Divine Messengers – the Báb (1819 – 1850) and Bahá'u'lláh (1817 – 1892). Today, the distinctive unity of the Faith they founded stems from explicit instructions given by Bahá'u'lláh that have assured the continuity of guidance following His passing. This line of succession, referred to as the Covenant, went from Bahá'u'lláh to His Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844 – 1921), and then from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to His grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1897 – 1957), and the Universal House of Justice (founded in 1963), ordained by Bahá'u'lláh.

Belief in God

God, the Creator of the universe, is all-knowing, all-loving and all-merciful.

The Bahá'í Writings explain that the reality of God is beyond the understanding of any mortal mind, though we may find expressions of His attributes in every created thing. Throughout the ages, He has sent a succession of Divine Messengers – among them Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, and, in more recent times, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. We look upon these Manifestations as like a polished mirror in which we can see the sun. In this manner God is the sun and the mirror is all of His Manifestations. Their purpose is to educate and guide humanity, awakening in whole populations capacities to contribute to the advancement of civilization.

Bahá'u'llah's Revelation affirms that the purpose of our lives is to know God and to attain His presence. Our true identity is our rational soul, whose free will and powers of understanding enable us continually to better ourselves and our society.

Walking a path of service to God and to humanity gives life meaning and prepares us for the moment the soul separates from the body and continues on its eternal journey towards its Maker.

Spirituality in daily life

Acts of devotion such as prayer, meditation, fasting, pilgrimage, and service to others are inherent to religious life. Through them, individuals and communities are able to continually reinforce the unique bond that exists between God and humanity.

Bahá'ís fulfil their highest purpose in a life of service in which, with humility and detachment, they offer their time, energy, knowledge, and financial resources.

An Ever-Advancing Civilization

Having passed through the ages of infancy and childhood, Bahá'ís believe that humanity has reached a point where the long-awaited coming of age is at hand, an age when the oneness of mankind will be recognised and a peaceful global society secured. Bahá'u'lláh wrote that, *“The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.”*

The cultivation of spiritual qualities in this world is inseparable from an ongoing refinement of our conduct in which our actions increasingly come to reflect the nobility and integrity with which every human being is endowed.

Our relationship with nature

Bahá'ís believe that the beauty, richness and diversity of the natural world are all expressions of the attributes of God.

This inspires a deep respect for nature. Humanity has the capacity to emancipate itself from the world of nature and, as steward of the planet's vast resources, it is responsible for using the earth's raw materials in a way that preserves harmony and contributes to the advancement of civilization.

One Human Family

The conviction that we belong to one human family is at the heart of the Bahá'í Faith. The principle of the oneness of humankind is 'the pivot round which the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve...'

Realisation of the principle of the oneness of humanity is at once the goal and operating principle of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. Harmonious relationships among individuals, communities, and institutions serve to sustain society and allow for the advancement of civilization.

Working Together

Consultation is the keynote of all Bahá'í administration. There is no clergy or ritual. The scripture is in written form, preserved and authentic. Administrative bodies are called Spiritual Assemblies; they are local, national and international. All Assemblies meet in a spirit of prayer.

They are elected by the people, but their responsibility is a trust from God to whom alone they are answerable. There is no seeking of votes, no candidates, no platform, no parties.

At the start of each Bahá'í month of 19 days there is a community gathering for prayer and reading of scripture, discussion of affairs with the Local Spiritual Assembly, and sharing of food and drink together.

The Universal House of Justice—the elected international body constituted by Bahá'u'lláh as the supreme legislative and governing body governing the Faith—carries out its duties at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel.

Bahá'ís in Cardiff

The Local Spiritual Assembly has been formed each year since its initial foundation in 1948. As well as overseeing and supporting the development of the Bahá'í community the Assembly has been regularly involved in interfaith activities.

Currently there is no Bahá'í House of Worship in Cardiff so we meet in each other's homes and hired halls.

Local Spiritual Assembly of Bahá'ís in Cardiff

PRINCIPLES OF BUDDHISM

The core of Buddhism is the development of wisdom and the practice of loving kindness. Through this one discovers that they are the same: wisdom is kindness; kindness is wisdom.

Buddhism is a religion of personal practical application and experience rather than adherence to a belief. It is an atheist—or non-theistic—religion. It manifests in many different forms in different areas of the world, adapting its outer form or appearance to the culture in which it is practised. Buddhism is not a religion of a single book. The scriptures are based on the teachings of individual realised teachers.

Buddhism states that enlightenment can be awakened in anyone and everyone. ‘Buddha’ means ‘Awakened One’. The presentation of the path to awakening will exhibit the qualities of the teacher, and the culture, in which the teacher gained realisation.

At its most essential level the principle of Buddhism can be expressed as the non-duality of emptiness and form, as stated in the Heart Sutra: ‘Form is emptiness and emptiness is form. Form is not separate from emptiness, and emptiness is not separate from form.’ Realised emptiness manifests as wisdom and realised form manifests as active compassion.

The thoughts and deeds of any being who has awakened wisdom-mind will naturally manifest as compassionate activity.

Any being who spontaneously manifests compassionate activity will naturally dwell in awakened wisdom-mind.

Many Buddhists regard the first teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha—the historical Buddha—as expressing the core principles of Buddhism. This teaching is usually called The Four Noble Truths. The first noble truth is the experience of dissatisfaction – even if we are happy with our lives and successful, there is still an element of dissatisfaction however subtle or slight. (Dissatisfaction or ‘suffering’; Sanskrit: dukkha; Tibetan: dug-ngal, *sDug bsNgal*). The second noble truth is that there is a cause of this experience of dissatisfaction. The third noble truth is that the experience of dissatisfaction can cease. The fourth noble truth is the eightfold path that creates the cause for the cessation of dissatisfaction. This consists of right view, right intention, right speech or communication, right action, right livelihood or vocation, right effort, right attention and right presence. (‘Right’ – meaning ‘correct’, ‘appropriate’, ‘congruent’.)

The multifarious forms of Buddhism that exist are commentaries on the cause of the experience of dissatisfaction, and offer methods to cease the experience of dissatisfaction.

One of the main practices of a Buddhist is meditation: ‘Buddhist meditation is fundamentally concerned with two themes: transforming the mind and using it to explore itself and other phenomena’ (Ref: Wikipedia, Buddhism).

Approaches to discovering the cause of dissatisfaction and creating the cause for its cessation fall into two broad categories: Sutryana and Vajrayana.

Sutrayana holds the view that Buddha-nature is like a seed that has to be nurtured. It grows through the mire of distorted views and afflicted emotions. The main problem for human beings is said to be desire and the primary path is renunciation. The focus is on letting go of the objects of desire and realising emptiness and wisdom-mind. The primary manifestation of the sutric path of renunciation is monasticism.

Vajrayana holds the view that Buddha-nature is beginninglessly present and our relationship with experience simply needs to be transformed in order to realise the non-duality of form and emptiness. Emotions and desires are engaged *as* the path of transformation. The path of transformation can be symbolic or non-symbolic. Symbolic Vajrayana employs visualisation of the awareness-being as the method of transformation. (Awareness-being, 'deity'; Sanskrit: ishtadeva; Tibetan yidam, *yi dam*) Non-symbolic Vajrayana offers direct introduction into non-duality, awakened-mind.

The majority of Buddhist traditions in the world practise from the perspective of Sutrayana. There are two main types: Theravada (Vehicle of the Elders) and Mahayana (Great Vehicle).

The path is to be mindful of one's thoughts and actions and attempt to manifest kindness in the world, and avoid falling into the trap of the three root misconceptions. The three root misconceptions are attraction, aversion and indifference, commonly referred to as desire, hatred and ignorance.

Desire or attraction ranges from the slightest preference to insatiable craving that must be fulfilled at any cost.

Aversion ranges from the slightest feeling of irritation or wishing something to be different, to raging murderous hatred. Indifference refers to simply ignoring or not caring.

All three can be related back to basic ignorance: the wrong view of an inherently existent self (Sanskrit: *atman*; Tibetan: *dag*, *bDag*). This wrong view is that the self has the form qualities of solidity, permanence, separateness, continuity and definition, denying the emptiness qualities of insubstantiality, impermanence, connectedness, discontinuity and lack of definition. Belief in an inherent self causes us to desire that which seems to benefit us, be averse to that which appears to threaten us, and to ignore that which seems to neither benefit or threaten us. The existence of such an inherently existent self is refuted in Buddhism (Sanskrit: *anatman*; Tibetan: *dag-med*, *bDag med*).

Other primary tenets of Buddhism include karma and rebirth. Karma is often called the ‘law of cause and effect’. A pattern is created in the mind-stream through perception. Satisfaction in the result of intention, carried through into action, lays down a pattern in the mind-stream that becomes more and more deeply established through repetition. Sutrayana—the path of renunciation—seeks to gradually erode patterning through mindfulness. Vajrayana—the path of transformation—seeks to eliminate patterning in the moment by transforming view.

Rebirth is the understanding that consciousness is a continual stream of arising and dissolving being. This stream continues even when the body in which the consciousness resided has died. In Tibetan Buddhism in particular there is the tradition of lineages being passed down from one incarnation to another.

When someone becomes a Buddhist they may take part in a ceremony of refuge (Sanskrit: *sharana*; Tibetan: *kyab, sKjabs*). Refuge is taken in Buddha, Dharma and sangha. Buddha is the Awakened One, and a reflection of our own potential to awake. Dharma is the body of teachings and the path of practice. Sangha is the community of practitioners. Added to this is devotion to the teacher, who also becomes a source of refuge.

Ngakma Nor'dzin Pamo
Chair of the Buddhist Council of Wales

CHRISTIANITY

Christians, first of all, believe in a God who created the universe and everything therein and who has revealed himself to us. They believe that he first spoke to the Jewish people, his chosen ones, through the Law and the prophets and he taught them to wait for the promised Saviour. When the time was right, about two thousand years ago, he fulfilled his promises by sending his own Son to be born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem.

Jesus Christ is believed to be the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. He is seen as a human being like us, but without sin, who transformed people's lives by his teaching and his miracles. He reached out with God's healing and forgiveness and his greatest act of love was to offer his life for us in sacrifice, in obedience to the Father. He let himself experience the depths of human suffering, even to being crucified. His death on the cross brings us forgiveness and reconciliation. On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus then revealed himself plainly to his followers and convinced them that he had truly risen from the dead. By ascending to heaven in his glorified humanity he showed that our goal is to be with God for all eternity. After his Ascension Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to his followers so that they could share in his divine life and proclaim it to others.

In this way he revealed the mystery of the Holy Trinity: that within the unity of God there is a communion of Divine Persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—equal in majesty and glory.

Jesus gathered his followers together into a new family called the Church, founded on the twelve apostles chosen from among his first disciples. This community would be both a sign of his continuing presence in the world and a place where people could share in the new life Jesus had won for them. Jesus gave his Church a way of life that is handed on in its Tradition. He gave it the inspired words of the Holy Scriptures, in the Bible. The Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) together with the four Gospels and other writings of the early Church (the New Testament) are identified by Christians as the inspired Word of God and this is what constitutes the Christian Bible.

Catholic and Orthodox lives are transformed by the seven sacraments that Christ gave to his Church. A sacrament is a sacred ritual that helps us to see the reality of salvation, and allows that reality to change our lives. The sacraments give a Christian a share in God's own life through the gift of the Holy Spirit and through their response of faith.

Through Baptism and Confirmation one is united with the death and resurrection of Jesus and made a Christian. Marriage and Ordination are specific vocations. Reconciliation, or Confession, and Anointing bring forgiveness and healing.

In the Mass, the Holy Eucharist, Christians share in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, with Christ and with the whole Church, they worship the Father and in Holy Communion they receive Christ himself as food and drink.

A living faith involves a commitment to follow Christ and to do the Father's will.

The heart of Christian morality is the twin commandment to love God and to love our neighbour. It is to love as Christ himself loved.

Christ gives us his own moral teaching in the New Testament which fulfils the teaching of the Old Testament. He continues to guide us by means of the moral teaching of the Church in every generation and at the end of time, when Christ comes again, our bodies will share in the Resurrection. God will reveal the hidden purposes of his creation and reconcile all things in Christ. The just will live in the presence of God for all eternity.

From early times there were issues on which not all Christians saw eye to eye and there was a great split in the Church in the eleventh century when the Eastern—Orthodox—Church fell out irreconcilably with the Catholic Church as a result of which the two churches are not in full communion with each other to this day. Again, in the sixteenth century Martin Luther, a German theologian, inspired the Protestant Reformation to combat corruption in the Catholic Church and out of this the Church of England arose with the King, Henry VIII, assuming its headship.

Notwithstanding, however, various differences in emphasis and interpretation, the Anglican Church professes the same Creed as the Roman Catholics as do the Methodists who grew up in the 18th century under John Wesley, a great itinerant preacher and Anglican priest. Despite Wesley, Methodists are called Non-Conformists because they did not conform to the norms of the Church of England, the established church. Following their founder, they set great store on preaching the gospel of redemption.

While some Baptists, also Non-Conformists, claim their origins in the early days of Christianity when there was already dissension from the rule of the Roman church, others date themselves from the 17th century but their overriding principle is that baptism should be only for professing believers and then by total immersion.

The United Reformed Church which brought together the English and Welsh Presbyterians as well as English, Welsh and Scottish Congregationalists—not to mention the Church of Christ—combines its commitment to the Reformed tradition with a passionate belief that all God's people should be one and, in seeking to work with Christians of all traditions, it rejoices in being part of more than 400 ecumenical partnerships.

Pentecostalism is a form of Christianity which emphasises the work of the Holy Spirit and the direct experience of the presence of God by the believer.

Mormons, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, believe that returning to God requires the example of Jesus Christ and accepting his atonement through ordinances such as baptism. They believe that Christ's church was restored through Joseph Smith and is guided by living prophets and apostles.

The Salvation Army is an army of people, literally, committed to saving souls, growing saints and serving suffering humanity.

In prayer Christians lift their hearts and minds to God. They praise him and thank him. They ask for his forgiveness and help, for themselves and for others.

All Christian prayer is made 'in the name of Jesus' and this reminds Christians that they can only reach the Father's heart through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians worship only God but they also honour the saints and angels and call on their help.

Reverend Canon Peter Collins and John Fellows

HINDUISM – SANATAN DHARMA

Introduction

People who follow Hinduism are called ‘Hindus’. It is also known as ‘Hindu Dharma’, ‘Hindu Religion’, ‘Sanatan Dharma’ or ‘Vedic Dharma’.

It is recognised as the most ancient religion and may date to prehistoric times. It is different from other religions, as it has no founder, no single teacher, seer or prophet. Hindus believe that there is part of God in everyone and this is called Atman (soul).

Hinduism is not a single religious faith system because it does not insist on any fixed set of doctrines. There are varieties of religious traditions in Hinduism. In spite of this diversity there is unity in basic principles – these basic principles are based on Sanatan (eternal) Dharma (laws of nature).

Dharma is a concept central to Hinduism, and has many meanings, including ‘duty’, ‘righteousness’, ‘ethics’, and is also considered as ‘a way of life’. Dharma is based on teachings of Vedas (Holy Scriptures).

Scriptures – Vedas

The main scriptures for Hindus are Vedas – Holy Scriptures. There are divided into four: Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sam Veda and Athrav Veda. The word ‘Veda’ is from the Sanskrit Language; it means ‘to know’. Therefore Veda is literally the book of knowledge.

Other Scriptures – Upanishads and Puranas

The word Upanishad means ‘finding knowledge by sitting near the feet of the teacher (guru)’ [Upa – near; Ni – down; Sad – sit]. Hinduism allows questioning and Upanishads are a record of conversations between students and their guru.

There are 18 main Puranas. God incarnates (avatar) again and again in human form for the protection of Dharma and the doctrine of Bhakti (total devotion and love towards god) is well established in Puranas. The Hindu way of life has been influenced by stories of the Puranas. The teaching of Bhakti in the Puranas was to make religion practical, to bring it from its high philosophical imagery into the everyday lives of common people.

Language – Sanskrit

All Hindu Scriptures—Vedas, Upanishad and Puranas—were written in Sanskrit. It is a very old language and is still used by a few. Some current prayers are still in Sanskrit. Words like pooja, mandir, dev, deepa and havan used extensively now are all from Sanskrit. Hindus regard Sanskrit as the mother of all Indian Languages.

Concepts and Values

One God – the fundamental concept in Hinduism (Sanatan Dharma) is that God is one but has many attributes and many functions hence he is called by many different names e.g. Brahma – the creator; Vishnu – the preserver/provider; Shiva – the dissolver/destroyer.

Values

Respect for mother and mother earth. This earth is my mother and I am the son of this earth.

Respect for father and ancestors. Bringing up children is a religious act – it is the dharma of parents. For children, the parents are therefore divine.

Respect for Guru. This is a great Hindu tradition – Guru (teacher) and shisya (Disciple/student). A guru is not just a teacher but the one who gives inspiration and passes on experience and knowledge. Parents, teachers and food are considered next to God.

Truth. Hindu scriptures state: ‘Truth alone triumphs’. This also appears on the national emblem of India (Satyameva Jayate) .

Righteous Living. One of the meanings of the term ‘Dharma’ is righteousness. Therefore righteous living is an essential part of Hindu values and way of life.

Non-violence (Ahimsa). Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered and therefore the practise of non-violence is most important. Hinduism strongly advocates vegetarianism. Food is revered and wasting food is considered as bad karma.

Reincarnation. Life does not end with death – ‘as you sow, so shall you reap’. What perishes is the body, the soul is immortal and eternal. When body dies, the soul assumes a new body to experience the fruits of good and bad actions of previous life. This is called ‘samsara’ – the cycle of birth and death.

Moksha (liberation, salvation, emancipation). The final goal of human life is the liberation of the soul from the cycle of birth and death. There are four different paths to achieve. Moksha are:

- a. Jnana Yoga – the path of spiritual knowledge leading to knowing the relationship between the Atman (soul) and God.
- b. Dhyana yoga – the path of meditation to reach the real self in you and become one with God.
- c. Bhakti Yoga – choosing a particular God and worshipping him all one's life in words, actions and deeds.
- d. Karma Yoga – doing all duties correctly throughout one's life and without expecting rewards.

Religious Symbols. Aum: Aum is the main Hindu symbol. It is also regarded as a symbol of supreme god and is the most powerful word symbol for use in prayers and meditation. Hindus believe that it was the first sound produced at the creation of the universe and is regarded as the highest mantra. *Swastika:* Swastika is a religious symbol of auspiciousness, world peace and prosperity.

Sacraments. Similar to other religions, Hindus have numerous sacraments, making an individual's transit from one stage of life to another. There are many sacraments defined in Scripture but most widely accepted are sixteen.

Worship

Festivals. Hindu festivals are much more than celebrations. Hindus take great care and pride in maintaining and preserving their festivals because through these events they pass their religious values from one generation to another. These involve times of feasting and fasting e.g. Holi festival of colour (March/April); Diwali – festival of lights (October/November).

Puja (Pooja). Pooja is worshipful means of direct personal communication with God. This is a basic tenant of Hinduism and there are many different forms of worship. It can be performed in private in one's home in front of the chosen deity or shrine, or in communal building called Mandir (Hindu Temple).

Pilgrimage (Tirth Yatra). It is a way of achieving spiritual merit by visiting the shrines and holy places. During pilgrimage a person would also do penance for self-purification.

Fasting (Vrat or Upvase). Vrat literally means vows. Single and married persons frequently perform special votive observances called 'Vrat'. These are observed for the welfare of husband, extended family or the community. Vrat lasts for a specific period. The most popular is fasting every 15th day called Ekadashi.

Finally

A Hindu does not believe in, nor advocates, the conversion from one religion to another. A popular Sanskrit phrase is:

'Vasudhaiva kutumbakam.'

It means:

'The Whole Human Race Is Just One Family'

Naran B Patel M.B.E.

President of the Shree Swaminarayan Temple Cardiff

ISLAM

Islam is the religion followed by Muslims and the word ‘Islam’ has meanings related to peace and devotion to God. The core beliefs of Muslims can be summed up in the *shahada*, or the statement of faith, which states:

*There is nothing worthy of worship but God;
Muhammad is the Messenger of God.*

Muslims try to use this statement to guide all aspects of their lives – by following the example of the Prophet Muhammad, who is thought to be the model human being having the best standard of character, they can worship God in the way that pleases Him the most.

Prophets – From Adam to Muhammad

But Muslims don’t just follow one prophet – they believe in all the Biblical prophets and use their examples to inform their daily lives. Five prophets held in particularly high esteem are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon them all).

Stories from the lives of these prophets and many others are told in the Quran (the holy book sent to Muhammad) and Muslims are encouraged to reflect on the lessons of these narrations.

The previous prophets and their scriptures are seen as being part of a chain of revelation sent by God, all conveying the same message to worship the one God.

The Quran

The holy scripture sent to Prophet Muhammad is called the Quran, which literally means a recitation. It is believed to be the word of God sent down to Muhammad via the angel Gabriel. The Quran consists of 114 chapters, or *suras*, of various lengths. These cover a spectrum of topics, from religious and moral guidance to spirituality, from stories of previous Prophets and peoples to instructions on daily life. As such, the Quran is used as source of guidance for all aspects of life.

Muslims understand the Quran through the *hadith*, which are sayings of the Prophet Muhammad or narrations about his life, actions and teachings. The Quran is thus not taken alone, but interpreted and contextualised through the Prophet Muhammad whose character was described as being an embodiment of the Quran.

Prayer – the Renewal of Spirituality

One of the most important aspects of worship for Muslims is the five daily prayers (*salah*). These prayers consist of a formula of repeated words and movements and they are used by Muslims as a chance to renew their spirituality and connect with God throughout the day.

The prayers are a chance to contemplate the meaning of life as well as being a source of comfort in times of stress and difficulty. They are a chance for Muslims to remember that there is something greater than themselves and the world we live in.

Although *salah* has set time-slots throughout the day, prayers in the less formal sense can be done at any time. Muslims are told that God loves it when people ask Him for things and are encouraged to supplicate to God for anything, even as small as asking for salt on their food.

Life as Worship

Islam teaches that the purpose of a human being's life is to worship God, and although prayer is a vital part of that, the scope of worship is much wider. Muslims believe that every aspect of life, from eating to sleeping to socialising, can be an act of worship. The emphasis on good character is a particularly important part of worship since Prophet Muhammad said:

“I was not sent except to perfect noble character”

Muslims look to the life of Prophet Muhammad and try to emulate him and embody his excellent character. Throughout his life he was known to be very charitable, to support the poorest and most disadvantaged in society and to be kind and generous with everyone he met. When he talked to people, he would make them feel like they were the most important person in the world. Additionally, he would support and help people in any way he could. Similarly, all Muslims are encouraged to be active and beneficial members of society. This was mentioned by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) when he said:

“The best person among you is the one who benefits others the most”

Islam in Cardiff

Although there have been Muslims in Britain for many centuries, the most significant arrival in Cardiff happened between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries during the time of the city's bustling port industry. In this period, sea merchants, mainly from Somalia and Yemen, arrived at the docks and many eventually made Cardiff their home. By the time of the First World War, the population of Muslims in Cardiff's dynamic Tiger Bay was estimated to be several thousand.

This significant community of Muslims warranted the attention of Muslim leaders abroad, and a scholar from Yemen, Shaykh Abdullah Ali al-Hakimi was sent to Cardiff in the 1930s to teach the Muslims of Cardiff about their faith. The Muslim community saw something of a revival at this time. When the Shaykh arrived, he established the Peel Street Mosque – one of the earliest mosques in Britain, and perhaps the first in Wales. The period also saw the creation of a number of welfare services for the local community, the organisation of annual dinners for leaders from various faiths, as well as the establishment of Wales' first Muslim burial site in Ely, something Muslims in Cardiff still benefit from today.

At present, there are thirteen mosques in Cardiff with congregants from a variety of ethnicities and one Muslim primary school.

The Muslims in Cardiff are very active in their community, being involved in Muslim scout groups, Islamic Societies at local universities as well as charitable ventures.

Muslims have a strong involvement in the wider community being part of initiatives such as Citizens UK and the anti-fascist 'Hope Not Hate' campaign. Cardiff is also home to an umbrella body, the Muslim Council of Wales, which hosts annual inter-faith dinners inviting politicians, faith leaders and many others.

Laura Jones
Chaplain at Cardiff Metropolitan University

JUDAISM

Judaism is a monotheistic faith, meaning that Jews believe there is only One G-d. Abraham is considered the father of the Jewish faith because he promoted the central idea of the Jewish faith: that there is one G-d.

Today nearly fourteen million Jewish people live all over the world. Approximately half of them live in the United States, one quarter live in Israel, and a quarter are scattered around the world. In Wales there are communities of Jews in Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and the North Wales coast.

God

Often G-d is beyond our ability to comprehend. How individual Jews choose to understand this manifestation of the divine varies. Some connect with G-d through prayer; others see the divine in the majesty of the natural world, others may not think about G-d on a daily basis. Each individual's relationship with G-d is unique and personal.

Humankind Was Created In the Divine Image

Judaism teaches that every person (Jewish and non-Jewish) was created '*b'tzelem Elohim*', Hebrew for '*in the image of G-d*' and so every person is equally important and has infinite potential to do good in the world.

Sacred texts of the Jewish people

The Torah (5 books of Moses) is Judaism's most important text. It contains stories and commandments that teach us about life and death. It contains the 10 Commandments and a further 603 commandments (*mitzvot*). All Jews consider the 10 Commandments to be the most important in the Torah, though not all Jews adhere to the 613 mitzvot (one of the main differences between the different branches of Judaism).

The Ten Commandments:

I am the Lord your G-d. / You shall have no other gods but me. / You shall not take the Name of the Lord your G-d in vain. / Remember the Shabbat day and keep it holy. / Honour your father and your mother. / You shall not murder. / You shall not commit adultery. / You shall not steal. / Do not give false testimony against your neighbour. / You shall not covet your fellow's possessions.

The Tanakh is the ancient collection of writings that are sacred to the Jews. They were written from 1000 to 100 BCE. The Torah is handwritten on parchment scrolls and kept in a special cabinet in synagogues called the *aron kodesh*, the Holy Ark. Each week, one section is read until the entire Torah is completed and the reading begins again. The Talmud was compiled in the 2nd century CE and records the rabbis' discussion of the way to follow the Torah at that time. Later texts, the Mishnah Torah and the Shulhan Aruch, are recordings of rabbinic discussions from later periods.

Jewish denominations

Ashkenazim – from Germany and Eastern Europe. What is often thought of as Jewish—bagels, black hats, yiddish—are actually specific to Ashkenazi culture. *Sephardim* – from Spain, the Iberian Peninsula and the Spanish Diaspora. *Mizrahim*, or Oriental Jews, originate primarily from Iraq, Persia (Iran), and Yemen, but can be found everywhere from Morocco to Calcutta. Two basic groups have a different understanding of the interpretation of the Torah: Orthodox Jews believe that all of the practices in the Torah, which it is practical to obey, must be obeyed without question; Reform Jews believe that the ancient laws and practices have to be interpreted for modern life, to include contemporary sources and with more concern with community practices than with ritual practices.

Prayer

Prayer is largely a group activity rather than an individual activity. Praying alone fulfils the obligation to pray, but a Jew should ideally pray with a group. A quorum of at least 10 adult Jewish men is required for a complete formal prayer service in Orthodox synagogues. In Reform synagogues 10 adult Jewish men and women suffice (*minyan*). It is permissible to pray in any language but traditionally the importance of praying in Hebrew is stressed.

Birth

A child born of a Jewish mother is considered to be Jewish. Male Jews are circumcised on the eighth day after birth (Brit Milah) by a Mohel, and given their Hebrew name.

The Hebrew naming of a baby girl should take place at the first occasion after the baby is born when the father can be called to the Torah.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Children are not required to observe the commandments, but upon turning 13-years-old, a boy is considered an adult under the law and is expected to obey all the commandments from then on. He has become a *Bar Mitzvah*, or 'Son of the Commandments.' Similarly, a girl becomes a *Bat Mitzvah*, 'daughter of the commandment,' upon turning 12-years-old. Young people can then lead religious services and count towards a *minyan*.

Marriage

Marriage is highly revered and strongly encouraged in Judaism. The celibate life has never been considered holier than married life, and one must be married in order to become a rabbi.

Death

Death is seen as a part of life and a part of the plan of G-d. Extensive mourning rites demonstrate the great value Judaism places on life in general and the life of each individual person. The body is never left alone as a sign of respect. Jewish communities have groups of volunteers, the 'holy society' (*chevra kaddisha*), who care for the dead. Burial takes place as soon as possible after death except on the Sabbath and major festivals.

Tombstones must be erected on all graves so the dead will be remembered and the grave will not be desecrated.

Food

‘Kosher’ is Hebrew for ‘fit’ or ‘appropriate’ and describes the food that is suitable for a Jew to eat.

According to the Torah only certain kinds of animals are considered inherently kosher: land animals that chew cud and have split hooves; sea creatures that have fins and scales; birds like those approved by the Torah (which excludes scavengers and birds of prey).

The Land of Israel

The Torah tells us that the Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*) was part of the covenant made between G-d and the Jewish People at Mount Sinai. However, there is no one view of Israel among modern day Jews.

Messiah

Judaism teaches that one day a Messiah (a person from G-d) will unite the world and bring peace to humanity.

Judaism On One Foot – Summing Up Judaism

A story in the Talmud: during the first century B.C.E. a great rabbi named Hillel was asked to sum up Judaism while standing on one foot. He replied: “Certainly! What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the Torah. The rest is commentary, now go and study.” Hence, at its core, Judaism is concerned with the wellbeing of humanity. The particular of every Jew’s individual belief system is the commentary.

Stanley Soffa
South Wales Jewish Representative Council

SIKHISM (SIKHI)

Sikhism at a glance

There are 20 million Sikhs in the world, who live mostly in the Punjab province of India. Punjab used to mean 'land of five rivers.' 'Panj' is five and 'aab' is rivers. The last census showed that there are more than 350,000 Sikhs in the UK.

Sikhism was founded in the 16th century in the Punjab district of what is now India and Pakistan. The founder was Guru Nanak and it is based on his teaching, and those of the nine Sikh Gurus who followed him.

The most important thing in Sikhism is the internal religious state of the individual.

- Sikhism is a monotheistic religion
- Sikhism stresses the importance of doing good action rather than merely carrying out rituals
- Sikhs believe that the way to lead a good life is to:
 - Keep God in heart and mind at all times
 - Live honestly and work hard
 - Treat everyone equally
 - Be generous to the less fortunate
 - Serve others

- The Sikhs' place of worship is called the Gurdwara (Guru House)
- The Sikhs' Holy scripture is Guru Granth Sahib, a book that the Sikhs considered a living Guru. Whatever is the size of this book it will always have 1430 pages. They put the Guru Granth Sahib in a four-poster bed every night and bring it to the altar in the morning. Guru Granth Sahib Ji was compiled by the 5th Guru, Guru Arjan Dev Ji

The tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh decreed that after his death the spiritual guide of the Sikh would be the teaching contained in the Granth Sahib. So the Guru Granth Sahib now has the status of a Guru, and the Sikhs show it the respect they would give to a human Guru.

Those men and women who have been initiated (baptised) into the Sikh Faith are called the Khalsa. The 10th Guru Baptised five Sikhs first in 1699 and then asked them to baptise him. All the Sikhs who have been baptised do not eat meat of any kind, do not drink alcohol, and do not cut any hair from any part of their body. The rest of the Sikhs do eat meat, but not beef or any animal killed in the halal manner. They do eat pork.

The Sikhs' Beliefs

- There is only one God
- God is without form or gender
- Everyone has direct access to God
- Everyone is equal before God

- A good life is lived as part of a community, by living honestly and caring for others
- Empty religious rituals and superstitions have no value.

Living in God and community

Sikhs focus their lives around their relationship with God and being part of the Sikh community. The Sikh ideal combines action and belief. To live a good life, a person should do good deeds as well as meditate to God.

God and the cycle of life

Sikhs believe that human beings spend their time in a cycle of birth, life and rebirth that one has to go through for 8,400,000 lives. Of these 4,200,000 are on land and 4,200,000 are under the sea before you become human and have a human life again. The quality of each particular life depends on ones karma. Karma sets the quality of life according to how well or badly a person behaved in their previous life. The only way out of this cycle, which all faith regards as painful, is to achieve a total knowledge of and union with God.

A human being pays for all the bad things that they did in previous lives and reap all the good things they did. When a person is born he is given only a certain amount of breathing during his life and a person breathes twice as much when he is sleeping. So the Sikhs are advised to eat less and sleep less because when they have used up all their breathing that is the end of their life.

The God of grace

Sikhs' spirituality is centred round the need to understand and experience God, and eventually become one with God. To do this a person must switch the focus of their attention from themselves to God. They will then attain the state called Mukti (Liberation), through the grace of God. That means that it's something God does to human beings and not something that human beings can learn. God shows people from holy books and by the examples of saints. It is the best way to get close to him.

Truth is the highest of all virtues but higher still is the truthful living

Sikhs believe that God cannot be understood properly by human beings but he can be experienced through love, worship and contemplation. Sikhs look for God both inside themselves and in the world around them. They do this to help themselves.

God inside us

Sikhs believe that God is inside every person, no matter how wicked they appear, and so everyone is capable of change.

The Sikhs have three duties: to pray, work and give. A Sikh needs to avoid the five vices: Lust, Covetousness, Greed, Anger and Pride. If a person overcomes these vices they are on the road to liberation.

The two biggest Gurdwara in the UK are in Birmingham and London. The Birmingham Gurdwara is in Soho Road, Handsworth.

The London Gurdwara is in Havelock Road, Southall, near Heathrow airport. This was built at a cost of 18 million pounds.

The Sikhs of Cardiff have three Gurdwaras: Tudor Street, in Riverside, which is the original, since 1956; Copper Street, in Adamsdown; and Pearl Street, in Splott. They meet every Sunday from 11:30am to 2pm. At about 2pm they all provide vegetarian food for every member of the congregation. The Gurdwara in Tudor Street is open every day from 8am to 11am and then from 5pm to 7.30 pm.

Any one can come—of any denomination—as long as they adhere to the rules and regulations, such as: removing their shoes, covering their head as they come inside the Gurdwara, and not to bring any tobacco into the Gurdwara. Also they should not come if they have consumed alcohol.

Other days that the Gurdwara is also open is when it is the birthday or commemoration day of one of the Gurus. Then the Gurdwara is open for three days and meals are served day and night, while four people take it in turn to read the Guru Granth Sahib day and night for 48 hours. If anyone is interested in visiting the Gurdwara they should telephone the priest at the above times to make an appointment.

Jaswant Singh. Jas M.B.E. JP

Aims of the South Cardiff Interfaith Network

1. To forge closer links between faith communities.
2. To encourage interfaith encounter on a regular basis.
3. To cooperate on joint projects.
4. To highlight the relevance of faith to the community.
5. To encourage understanding of the history and theological practice of faith communities.

Contact information

Baha'i

- <http://www.bahai.org> or www.bahai.org.uk
- <http://www.bci.org/cardiff>

Buddhism

- <http://www.buddhistcouncilofwales.org.uk>
- buddhistcouncilwales@gmail.com

Christianity

- <http://www.churchinwales.org.uk>
- <http://www.southwalesbaptistassociation.org.uk>
- <http://www.cardiffmethodist.org.uk>
- <http://www.salvationarmy.ie/cardiff-grangetown>
- <http://cityurc.org.uk>
- <http://lds.org.uk>
- <http://cytun.org.uk>
- cardiff.met.cath@btinternet.com

Hinduism

- Shree Swaminarayan Temple:
<http://www.swaminarayanwales.org.uk>

Islam

- <http://www.muslimcouncilwales.org.uk>

Judaism

- swjewishrepcouncil@gmail.com

Sikhism

- Tudor Street Gurdwara, Riverside, Cardiff
Telephone: 029 2022 4806

South Cardiff Interfaith Network

- <http://www.c3sc.org.uk/networks/cardiff-safer-communities-network/south-cardiff-interfaith-network>
- email: sc.interfaith.network@gmail.com

Butetown, Riverside & Grangetown
Communities First
contributed to the production of this booklet



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