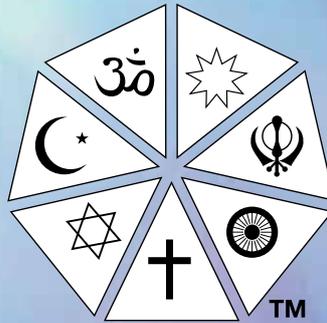


Many Faiths, One People



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the interfaith network of greater dandenong

A brief history

The Interfaith Network is a group of diverse cultural and religious faiths and spiritual organizations, who work in equal but independent partnership with the City of Greater Dandenong Council to promote peace and harmony with the municipality.

Established in 1989 as the first Interfaith Network in Australia, the Network consists of various traditional and multi-faith groups who meet monthly at the Council offices. Their goal is simple – promoting understanding, respect and tolerance for each other's belief by living together in peace and good will.

The Interfaith Network covers faith communities in the Springvale, Dandenong, Keysborough and Noble Park areas. The Network strives to achieve the vision of 'Many Faiths, One People'.

Membership

The network consists of leaders of the Aboriginal, Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish and Sikh faiths and their communities. The spiritual organisations of the Sathya Sai and the Brahma Kumaris are also members of the network.

Activities

Activities which the Interfaith Network promotes include:

- An Annual Gathering of the different faith communities, held in October on the Wednesday evening nearest United Nations Day (24th October)
- A comprehensive schools program which includes a Combined Schools Annual Interfaith Gathering – also held in October
- Tours of the various places of worship within the City of Greater Dandenong for members of the general public, council staff, school teachers, students and specific interest groups
- Participation in the Annual Induction of the new Mayor, where faith leaders renew their commitment to Council by re-affirming the Common Statement to promote mutual respect and tolerance for religious and cultural diversity
- The offering of prayer on a rostered basis at fortnightly Council meetings by different faith leaders
- Involvement in celebrating community festivals like Sunnatation and Harmony Day
- Sharing of faith beliefs and practices
- Providing resources for public events and multi-faith gathering in times of significant world events

For further information about the Interfaith Network, contact the City of Greater Dandenong on (03) 9239 5200 or visit the Network's website: www.interfaithnetwork.org.au

Common Statement of Interfaith Network

We bring greetings from the faith communities to the Mayor and the Councillors and people of Greater Dandenong.

We offer to the City of Greater Dandenong our common commitment to seek to live together in peace and goodwill.

We affirm our desire to promote respect and tolerance for the integrity of each other's beliefs, cultures and traditions. This desire arises not only from our common humanity but also from our being people of faith and people of prayer.

We recognise that as neighbours, we have responsibilities to the community, the world and ourselves. We therefore urge all citizens, both religious and non religious, to put aside intolerance, prejudice and divisiveness, to attain peaceful and fruitful co-existence in our City.

An Aboriginal World View

We begin by acknowledging the Kulin Nation people are the traditional owners of this particular part of Australia. This is the land of the Bunurong people, which at the present time is held in custodianship by the Wurunjeri people. We acknowledge the ancestors and the Great Spirit Bunjil, the Wedge Tail Eagle and Waa the Crow. We respect that the traditions of these people are still very much alive.

Introduction

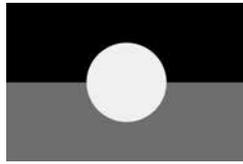
This is only a very brief and general outline of some of the basic elements of the Spirituality of the First Nation People of Australia. It must be remembered that each area, in fact each clan may have had its very own way of expressing its understanding of its place in the universe. So any one understanding cannot be applied to the whole country, let alone to all Aboriginal people. But there are some basic elements that we can describe. Professor Stanner (in the Charles Strong memorial Trust Inaugural Lecture in 1976) described what he call the 'tetrad' (having 4 parts) of Aboriginal Sprituality. The essence of this is: living people, their country (countries), their totems (although this term now must not be simplified to an understanding of animal worship) and their ancestors.

Living Country

Stanner much later honoured the beauty, complexity and sheer poetry of the Aboriginal belief systems. Aboriginal people lived in the world in an immediate and intimate way. From the campfires of the ancestors come the mystical wisdom of unity with the land. The primacy of land in the life and spirituality of Aboriginal people is expressed forcefully by Michael Dodson when he speaks of the need to 'begin with the land'. 'To understand our law, our culture and our relationship to the physical and spiritual world, you must begin with the land. Everything about Aboriginal society is inextricably interwoven with, and connected to the land, and the spirituality of the Aboriginal people, our culture, beliefs or reason for existence, is the land. You take that away and you take away our reason for existence. We have grown up on or with the land. We are dancing, singing and painting for the land. We are celebrating the land. Removed from the land, we are literally removed from ourselves'.

Living People – All Life

Aboriginal spirituality necessarily means that the spirit of a person is linked to the spiritual world within the land, that is to a particular place in the land, and to a particular ancestor. Each community recalls how in the beginning, the ancestor beings or 'creator beings' also emerged from the land



(or from the sea in some cases). These emerging spiritual forces walked the land and transformed the landscape. As they shaped the landscape they filled it with vast diversity of living things, animals, plants and minerals. As they wearied they returned to the land where their spiritual presence still persists for all time. The entire landscape is filled with the trails and sites where these creator beings travelled. The country becomes a story written in the land for those who know how to read the land. Where the creator beings re-entered the earth they left a powerful resonance, this became a significant site or sacred site where life rituals were (and are still) participated in.

Time of the Beginning - The Dreaming

In these rituals all potentials of human life are expressed. Through these rituals Aboriginal people felt they were carrying on the journeys of the first beings. Creation is not just remembered, it is the responsibility of each person to continue the Dreaming of these Ancestor beings. This is a felt reality, connections to things experienced in the body and retold through story and myth. These stories and myths become the song and dances known to each clan group. The repetition of these dances and songs creates a circle in which the whole spectrum of life is embraced. This includes past, present and future. We have come to know this consciousness as 'The Dreaming'.

Everything begins here and ends here. The consciousness of the Dreaming is SHARED by

every aspect of creation. None have dominance over another, and hence each aspect deserves the respect of the whole. This is a unified world view. A common consciousness and origins shared by every creature, every plant and mineral having all been endowed by the ancestors beings. To exploit any part of this integrated world view is to do the same to oneself and ones community. We feel, hear, sense with our whole bodies. Each is part of each, and each is in a mutual and reciprocal relationship to all the other parts and to the whole. Therefore there is accountability to every aspect and to the whole. To damage any part means the whole is damaged. We must be careful not to idealise so as to set up something that is untouchable, unliveable. But we can sense a wealth of wisdom and wonder that was shared by these people.

There is a vision of an interactive universe, the ancestors worked at feeling, being and interacting in all their occupations. The emphasis was on all members being imbued with a social consciousness from their infancy. Because of this sense all members feel they are people of worth and value. Each is important to their society as a whole, from the day of their birth to the day

"Gnokkan danna Murri Kor-ki" from the Koorie Heritage Trust "Come let us take hands and share this journey together"

Please visit the Interfaith Network's website for further information www.interfaithnetwork.org.au - see links

The Baha'i Faith

Introduction

The Baha'i Faith is an independent world religion with a current membership of over 5 million adherents, coming from virtually every nation, ethnic group, culture, profession and class. The Faith is today established in more than 230 countries and territories, making it the second most widespread independent religion.

Origins of the Baha'i Faith

The Forerunner of the Baha'i Faith was a young Persian merchant known as the Bab (the Gate), who in 1844 proclaimed Himself to be a Messenger of God and a herald of One greater than Himself - One who would inaugurate a new era in religion and civilization. Like earlier Messengers of God, the Bab was opposed and denounced. He was publicly martyred at the age of 30 in Tabriz.

Its founder was Baha'u'llah (the Glory of God), a Persian nobleman who in 1863 declared Himself to be the One whose coming the Bab and all the previous Prophets had foretold. Like His predecessor, He was bitterly opposed and persecuted. During nearly forty years of exile and imprisonment He committed to writing the teachings of His revelation, some of them in letters to the most important kings and leaders of religion, as well as teaching and training His followers. His fourth and last place of banishment, reached in 1865, was the prison city of 'Akka (Acre), Palestine, where He passed away in 1892 at the age of seventy four.

The Baha'i Faith

The Baha'i Faith is dedicated to the promotion of a world civilisation characterised by the true brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God.

It proclaims:

The Oneness of God
The Oneness of Religion
The Oneness of Mankind
The Equality of Men and Women

Encourages:

The Elimination of all forms of Prejudice
Universal Compulsory Education
The Elimination of extremes of Wealth and Poverty
Unity in Diversity

Advocates:

The Individual Search after Truth
The Harmony of Science and Religion
The use of a Universal Language
World Government
A Spiritual Solution of the Economic Problem
Universal Peace

Baha'i Writings

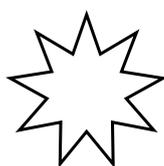
The writings that guide the life of the International Baha'i Community include numerous works by Baha'u'llah, the Prophet - Founder of the Baha'i Faith, and interpretations by His son, Abdu'l-Baha, and Baha'u'llah's great grandson, Shoghi Effendi. Also available are the works of The Universal House of Justice, the supreme legislative and governing body of the Faith. Baha'i literature can be read today in over 800 languages and dialects.

Baha'i Administrative Order

Consultation is the keynote of all Baha'i administration.

There are no clergy and no manmade rituals.

The Scripture is in written form, preserved and authentic.



Baha'u'llah established in His Writings administrative bodies known as Houses of Justice which operate on a local, national and international level. The local and national bodies are presently known as Spiritual Assemblies and are elected by the followers, annually.

The Universal House of Justice carries out its duties at the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, Israel, and is elected every five years by delegates from all National Baha'i Communities. All Houses of Justice meet in a spirit of prayer, there is no electioneering, no seeking of votes, no candidates, no platform promises, no parties, as their duties and responsibilities are a trust from God, to whom alone they are answerable.

The Feast: is a local community occasion held once every nineteen days and has 3 distinct aspects to it, i.e. spiritual/devotional, the business/administrative and the social. The 'nineteen day feast' constitutes for the Baha'is a basic consultative forum, at which open discussion is encouraged on all matters important to the community, through which communication is facilitated between the believers and all other administrative bodies.

The Fund: giving to Baha'i Funds is recognised as a spiritual obligation and only members of the Faith may do so.

Baha'i Laws

Besides spiritual laws requiring daily prayer and an annual period of fasting, the Baha'i Faith has social laws. It prescribes monogamy and upholds the importance of chastity. Marriage is conditional upon the consent of both parties and their parents. Divorce is discouraged in the Baha'i community, and Baha'i law requires a year of trial separation, after which, if differences cannot be resolved, divorce is permissible. Baha'i law also prohibits the use of alcoholic drinks and narcotics.

Baha'i Holy Days/Feasts/Anniversaries

Feast of Naw - Ruz	March 21* (New Year)
Feast of Ridvan (Declaration of Baha'ullah 1863)	April 21 - May 2,
First day of Ridvan	April 21 (Approx 3.00pm)*
Ninth day of Ridvan	April 29*
Twelfth day of Ridvan	May 2*,
The anniversary of the Declaration of the Bab, 1844	May 23 (approx 2 hours after sunset, May 22)*
The anniversary of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah, 1892	May 29, (3.00am)*
The anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Bab, 1850	July 9, (approx noon)*
The anniversary of the Birth of the Bab, 1819	October 20,*
Day of the Covenant	November 26
The anniversary of the Birth of Baha'u'llah, 1817	November 12,*
Ascension of Abdu'l-Baha, 1921	November 28, (1.00am)

*Work should be suspended.

The Baha'i Faith (cont.)

Prayer and Fasting

Baha'u'llah has revealed three daily obligatory prayers. The believer is free to choose any one of these three prayers, but is under the obligation of reciting one of them, and in the manner Baha'u'llah has prescribed.

The period of Fasting is March 2 through to March 20 (19 days) sunrise to sunset. It is not binding on children and invalids, on travellers, on those who are too old or too weak (including women who are with child or have babes at the breast.)

The Baha'i Calendar

The Baha'i year consists of 19 months of 19 days each (i.e. 361 days), with the addition of certain 'Intercalary Days' (four in ordinary and five in leap years) between the eighteenth and nineteenth months in order to adjust the calendar to the solar year. Each month is named after one of the attributes of God, i.e. Splendour, Glory, Beauty, Grandeur etc. The Baha'i days begin and end at sunset.

Baha'i Houses of Worship

These are given the name of Mashriqu'l-Adkar's (The Dawning Place of the Praise of God) and are open to all people of all nations, races, classes and creeds.

There are at present Houses of Worship existing in:

- Wilmette, Illinois, USA
- Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany
- Kampala, Uganda
- Sydney, Australia
- Panama City, Panama
- New Delhi, India
- Apia, Western Samoa

Eventually, each locality will have its own house of worship, which will serve as the point around

which the scientific, educational, humanitarian, and administrative institutions of the Baha'i community revolve.

Services of worship consist of the recitation of Baha'i scriptures and scriptures of the other divinely revealed religions.

Purpose of Religion

"The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men."

(Baha'u'llah)

"...religion must be the cause of unity, harmony and agreement among mankind. If it be the cause of discord and hostility, if it leads to separation and creates conflict, the absence of religion would be preferable in the world."

(Abdul'l-Baha)

"All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization."

(Baha'u'llah)

Progressive Revelation

Baha'is believe that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin. They have all been revealed by God in different places and different ages according to the evolving needs and capacities of the people. No age has been without guidance from God and as long as there are men on earth, God will give them guidance.

The appearance of a Manifestation of God on earth is a rare event. History records the names of but a few: Krishna, Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Bab and Baha'u'llah. Each one of Them has founded a religion and inspired a civilisation. Each one was bitterly opposed, ridiculed, scorned and ill treated by the people amongst whom They first appeared.

Only a few of Their contemporaries recognised Their station. Gradually, other men grew to recognise Them. After Their lives on earth were over, They were and still are loved, revered and followed by millions. Alone and unaided by earthly power, They established Their sovereignty over the hearts of men. They are the true Educators of humanity Whose purpose is to draw men ever nearer to God and to assist in the advancement of human civilisation.

Relationship to the United Nations

The Baha'i International Community has accredited consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). It is also affiliated with the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and, since 1948, with the UN Office of Public Information. It has representatives with the United Nations in New York, Geneva, and Nairobi. Local Baha'i communities are encouraged to support the UN's various humanitarian projects. The Baha'i International Community participates in meetings of UN agencies concerned with human rights, social development, the status of women, the environment, human settlement, food, science and technology, population, the law of the sea, crime prevention, substance abuse, youth, children, the family, disarmament, and the United Nations University.

Loyalty to Government

According to the direct and sacred command of Baha'u'llah, Baha'is are commanded to show forth peace and amity, are exhorted to rectitude of conduct, straight-forwardness and harmony with all the kindreds and peoples of the world. They must obey and be the well-wishers of the government of the land.

Obedience to a duly constituted government means submission to all its laws and regulations, the only exception being when a government demands actions, which amount to a repudiation of the Faith.

Baha'is are specifically forbidden by Baha'u'llah to take part in any subversive political, social or anti-religious movements, nor can they be members of political parties or secret organisations.

“We Baha'is are one the world over; we are seeking to build up a new World Order, divine in origin. How can we do this if every Baha'i is a member of a different political party, some of them diametrically opposite to each other? Where is our unity then? We would be divided, because of politics, against ourselves, and this is the opposite of our purpose.”

Baha'i Writings

It is the cherished desire of every true follower of Baha'u'llah to serve the interest of his country in an unselfish and truly patriotic way, whilst at the same time not deviating from upholding the high standards enshrined in the Teachings of the Baha'i Faith.

More Information

Please visit the Interfaith Network's website for further information www.interfaithnetwork.org.au - see links.

The Secretary

The Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Greater Dandenong

P O Box 226

SPRINGVALE VIC 3171

Buddhism

Core Beliefs

- **The Buddha**
- **The Dhamma**
- **The Sangha**

The Buddha:

Original name Siddhartha Gautama (624 BC Kapilavastu, Sakya Republic, Kosala Kingdom) founder of Buddhism, the great religion and philosophical system that produced a great culture.

Buddha, meaning awakened or enlightened one, is a title, not a proper name, and refers to anyone who has achieved perfect enlightenment. The Buddha was a human being. As a man He was born, as a man He lived, and as a man His life came to an end. Though a human being, He became an extraordinary man, but He never arrogated to himself divinity. His contemplative nature and boundless compassion did not permit him to enjoy the fleeting material pleasures of a royal household. He knew no woe, but he felt a deep pity for sorrowing humanity. Amidst comfort and prosperity, he realised the universality of sorrow.

With these thoughts in mind, the Buddha hesitated trying to explain to the world the truth that he has just realised. He then compared the world to a lotus pond: In a lotus pond there are some lotuses still under water; there are others that have risen only up to the water level; and there are still others that stand above the water and are untouched by it. In a similar way, into his world there are people of different levels of development. Some of them

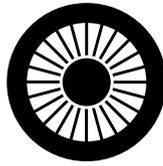
would understand the truth; the Buddha thus decided to teach what he had comprehended in the great Enlightenment.

The Dhamma:

Law, doctrine or truth; the timeless law of enlightenment; the teaching of the Buddha as the fullest expression of the law. In Buddhism, Dhamma, the Buddha, and the Sangha (community believers) make up the 'three jewels', the primary statement of the Buddhist belief. In Buddhist metaphysics the term in the plural (s) is used to describe the interrelated elements that make up the empirical world. The Dhamma is that which really is. It is the Doctrine reality. It is a means of Deliverance from suffering, and Deliverance itself. The Dhamma taught by the Buddha is not merely to be preserved in books, nor is it a subject to be studied from historical or literary standpoint. On the contrary it is to be learnt and put into practice in the course of one's daily life, for without practice one cannot appreciate the truth. The Dhamma is to be studied, and more to be practised and above all to be realised: immediate realisation is its ultimate goal.

The Sangha:

Buddhist monastic order. Traditionally, Buddhists have expressed their faith by taking refuge in the Buddha, in his teaching (Dhamma) and the Sangha. The Sangha is the assembly of Buddhist monks that has, from the origins of Buddhism, authoritatively studied, taught, and preserved the teaching of the Buddha. In their communities monks have served the laity through example, and as directed by Buddha, through the teachings of morality.



In exchange for their service the monks have received support from the laity, who thereby earn merit. Besides serving as the centre of Buddhist propaganda and learning the monastery offers the monk an opportunity to live apart from the worldly concerns, a situation that has usually been believed necessary or at least advisable in order to follow strictly the path of the Buddha to release.

Major religious Festivals

Vesak Day:

The most important of the Buddhist festivals, commemorating the birth of the Buddha. The event is observed on the full moon day of the lunar month Vesakha, which falls in April or May (Chinese calendar). The day is observed as a public holiday in many south-east Asian countries. It is marked by a special devotional services and meritorious acts, such as the presentation of food or alms to monks or the release of captive birds and fish in memory of the Buddha's compassion.

Ullumbana Day:

Mother's Day - is a remembrance of mothers, living and dead. Buddhists are reminded to love for their mothers, from their hearts - not in material terms. They are also reminded to pray for the souls of deceased mothers. To do this, they may visit the temple, prepare a meal or fruit to be placed on the altar. The monks offer prayer for the souls of the deceased. It is more important to pray for the souls of the deceased than make offerings. On this

day, the monks give talks to the people about love and respect for mothers and gratitude for all they do. The prayers are followed by a ceremony of pinning a pink flower on the left side (heart side) - symbolising living mothers and a white flower for deceased mothers. The 'pink' flowers indicate the 'lucky' people who still have their mothers. Mothers love is an endless ocean, those who have their mothers are very fortunate.

Festivals commemorating the Buddha are very, very important, because they are opportunities to fulfil one's responsibility to help mothers and fathers when they are older and pray that Buddha will help their souls to be free.

Explanation of Symbol Dhamma Cakka

This logo is called 'The Wheel of Dhamma'. It is based on 'Dhammacakkappavattanasutta' or setting in motion the Wheel of Dhamma (TRUTH). The Buddha's first sermon.

The Four Noble Truths are the essence of the Buddha's teaching, namely the Noble Truth of Suffering or unsatisfactoriness (Dukkha). It's arising (Samudaya). Its cessation (Nirodha) and the path leading to the cessation of Suffering (Magga). The Four Noble Truths which are expounded in the discourses consisting of twenty-four factors.

Buddhism (cont.)

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Birth is suffering (repeated existence) 2. Old Age 3. Death 4. Sorrow 5. Grief 6. Physical Suffering 7. Mental Suffering 8. Anguish 9. Association with the unplesant 10. Dissociation from the pleasant 11. Not to get what one wants 12. In short, the five aggregates of grasping is dukkha (impermanence) 	<p><i>1. Noble Truth of Suffering</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Desire for sensual pleasure 14. Desire for becoming (Eternalism) 15. Desire for non becoming (Nihilism) 	<p><i>2. Noble Truth of Cause of Suffering</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Enlightenment of Nibbana 	<p><i>3. Noble Truth of Cessation of Suffering</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Right Understanding 18. Right Thoughts 19. Right Speech 20. Right Actions 21. Right Mindfulness 22. Right Effort 23. Right Livelihood 24. Right Concentration 	<p><i>4. Noble 8-Fold Path to Attain Enlightenment</i></p>

Thus twenty-four spokes of the 'Wheel of Dhamma' imply the twenty-four factors of the Four Noble Truths.

Buddhist Temples in the City of Greater Dandenong

Please visit the Interfaith Network's website for further information
www.interfaithnetwork.org.au - see links

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- 'Buddhisms in a Nutshell' by Narada Thera



Christianity

Who are Christians?

Christians are people who believe in the one God as revealed in Jesus and the Spirit. The Christian community is called the people of God.

Do Christians form one single Church?

Because of changes and divisions over the centuries there now exist several Christian groups. In the Greater Dandenong area they are listed in the Greater Dandenong Directory / Website.

These Churches today are moving towards friendly relationships and some forms of unity.

Christians comprise about 33% of the population of the world.

There are four major families of the Christian Church

- 1. Catholic***
- 2. Orthodox***
- 3. Protestant***
- 4. Charismatic***

What do we mean by the 'Christian' Church?

When any group of Christians gathers together through word, witness and service, they are 'the Church'. The word 'church' is often used to describe the building in which these people gather.

What do Christians Believe?

Christians believe:

- in one God
- Jesus Christ
- the Spirit
- that Jesus gave his life for the love of them
- that his rising to a new life is the promise of their resurrection
- that he came to restore right relationship between God and humanity and between all people.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life
(Jn. 3:16, 17)

They believe that God is revealed to all people:

- through the wonder of creation
- by becoming part of our human story
- through the living Word, Jesus Christ.

This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.
(Jn.17:3)

As recorded in:

- a. Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and
- b. Christian Scriptures (New Testament)

which together, make up the Bible.

Through Jesus, the one God becomes known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- ***Father / Creator***
- ***God-Son / Redeemer***
- ***Spirit / Inspirer***

Christianity (cont.)

God is both the ground of all being and beyond all being.

I am the Lord and there is no other.
(Is. 45:18b)

For my thoughts are not your thoughts nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
(Is.55:8,9)

For what other great people has had a god so near to it as the Lord our God is whenever we call to Him?
(Dt.4:7b)

I am the Alpha and the Omega' - says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.
(Rev.1:8)

An historical summary of Christian belief is found in the Apostles' Creed.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic* church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

*meaning 'universal'

What is the Christian life?

Christians strive to live out their beliefs both personally and as a community of believers who gather together.

The Christian way of life is based on what Jesus taught by:

- who he was
- what he said
- what he did

Jesus' basic teaching on right living is found in the command to love:

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind'. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'
(Matt. 22:37-39)

His teaching is further spelled out in the 'Beatitudes'

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called Children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

(Matt.5:3-11)

He showed in his actions compassion for people,

bringing about truth and justice, which he called the 'Kingdom of God'.

He came to save those who were alienated from God and from each other (sin), and to reconcile them through his life, death and rising to new life (resurrection).

The Spirit of God transforms the lives of Christians within, they become followers of Jesus and work for the Kingdom.

'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.'
(Gal.5:2)

Jesus himself has taught his followers to pray:

***Our Father in heaven
hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.***
(Matt.6:9-13)

The Christian response to God is called "faith". It is expressed in behaviour, ritual, stories, teaching and preaching, moral code, prayer, social life, etc.

Festivals and Celebrations

All Christians would celebrate the 2 major feasts of

Easter	the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (date is moveable in Australian Autumn)
Christmas	<p>the birth of Jesus Christ (25th December)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Christians gather together to remember Jesus and celebrate his presence among them (this celebration often involves the sharing of bread and wine in Communion)• to listen to God's Word from the Bible <p><i>All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.</i> (2Tim.3:16,17)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• and are sent out to serve God in their lives.

Scripture Quotation

NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) Copyright 1989. Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

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Hinduism at a Glance

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions and yet it is evolutionary and progressive. It is not confined to one book or one prophet. It originated in the prayers and philosophy of the Aryans embodied in the Scriptures called Veda or 'the Knowledge' and developed into a way of life for the people of India. It is a blend of Aryan and the indigenous or Dravidian cultures.

The name "Hindu" is derived from the name of a river in north India - Sindhu or Indus. It was first used by Zoroastrians in their Avestan literature and later popularised by Persian Muslims. Eighty per cent of over a billion people of India are Hindus. They have migrated in small numbers to Sri Lanka, Africa, Malaysia and other parts of the world, both in ancient and modern times. There are about 80,000 Hindus in Australasia, coming from India, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Malaysia and other countries. Nepal and Bali are the only other predominantly Hindu countries.

OM, the sacred symbol of the Hindus, signifies the all-permeating sound

A - U - M and is used for meditation. It also unifies the multiplicity of gods and goddesses as a common symbol. The basic principles in the Vedas - the first Scriptures of the Hindus are:

- 1. God is one, the wise call Him differently;**
- 2. The whole world is or should be a family;**
- 3. Religion is for the happiness of many and welfare of all;**
- 4. The soul is immortal and man is divine;
and**
- 5. Man is never satisfied by wealth. Spiritual or self realisation should be the aim of life.**

Dharma the equivalent Sanskrit word for religion means 'duty', pervading all walk of life. Doing one's duty as prescribed for the four classes of society and the four stages of life is the way of life. The four classes of people - the Priests, the Warriors, the Merchants and the Farmers or Workers were originally based on the education and training of a person but later they were perpetuated by birth. It has lost its relevance in modern India but it served its limited purpose of maintaining and sustaining the unity of the people of various races and languages under the constant threat of foreign invasions.

The four stages of life are:

- a. as a student;**
- b. as a family man;**
- c. as a semi-retired or detached person; and**
- d. as one who has renounced everything for the service of society.**

The role as a family person or a householder is the main period of life for the sake of personal and social responsibilities. Pursuit of spiritual realisation through meditation and renunciation is and should be the ultimate goal of life.

There are three paths of salvation of self-realisation i.e. realising and reaching the God within you.

- i the path of devotion or BHAKTI;**
- ii the path of action or KARMA; and**
- iii the path of study or knowledge JNAN.**

This can be reached while performing one's duties towards the family and the society. The three paths are interdependent and they intermingle in our life.



Bhagavadgita or the Song of the Lord is a compilation of 700 verses explaining the essential philosophy and practice of Hinduism. Hindus believe in immortality of the soul and in the cycle of life and death. They also believe in the theory of KARMA or the theory of cause and effect of one's actions. It provides an incentive to do good in the hope of reaping its benefits in this or later life and it is also a deterrent to do bad things as they are sure to rebound. Various commentaries on the Vedic literatures called SMRITIS and the mythological stories called PURANAS form the continuous source of Hindu philosophy and practice. RAMAYANA and MAHABHARATA are the two main epics that have influenced the life of Hindus and they form the basis of beliefs and ideas. The Hindu trinity is the three main gods BRAHMA, VISHNU, and SHIVA in charge of creation, sustenance and destruction respectively. God Vishnu is supposed to have reincarnated several times. RAMA and KRISHNA the two heroes are considered the 7th and 8th incarnations of Vishnu. Gautama, Buddha, founder of Buddhism is venerated as the 9th incarnation of Vishnu.

Organisation and Religious Observances

Hinduism is not an organised religion with a monastery, church or mission. It is both a strength and a weakness of the social fabric. It is open to various interpretations and practices. It encompasses all groups of people including atheists and animists. Various sages, saints and social reformers have influenced its development from ancient to modern times. There are mainly three types of priests - temple priests, family priests and preachers or lecturers. Family priests are expected to visit

individual families on demand and conduct various ceremonies from birth to death. Visits to a temple are not obligatory but one does visit a temple on special occasions. Pilgrimage is part of one's religious life and Hindus visit temples of all gods and goddesses irrespective of their personal deity as a family tradition. The Hindu calendar is basically lunar and the new year is in the month of March or April when the moon enters the first house. "Shaka" and Samvat" are the two most popular eras started by King Shalivan in 78 A. D. and by King Vikramaditya in 57 B.C. respectively. Each month starts on the first day after the no-moon day. An additional calendar month is observed to bring it in line with the more scientific solar calendar.

The festival of Shivarati or the night of the Lord Shiva (February) and Holi or Spring festival (March). The Birthdays of Rama (March/April), Krishna (August/September), the Ganesh Festival (September), the Victory of Goddess Durga over the evil Vijayadashami (October) and Diwali or the festival of lights (October/November) are some of the important Indian festivals.

Diwali is the family or social festival like Christmas. Daily prayer and occasional fasting are a part of Hindu ritual but varies according to one's personal belief and ability. Although Hindu temples are built for a specific god or goddess, other deities also find a shrine in each temple for the benefit of all devotees.

The temple of Radha-Krishna in St Kilda, built by the Hare Krishnas is visited by all Hindus on important occasions. The Hindu Society of Victoria built a temple in Carrum Downs in 1994 for the two main gods Shiva and Vishnu, like a "uniting church" for Catholics and Protestants. There are shrines for other deities too.

Hinduism at a Glance (cont.)

Historical Perspective

Hinduism is kept up-to-date through the efforts of various reformers and leaders. Gautama Buddha and Mahavira Jain were the first reformers who re-emphasised the importance of non-violence in worship in the 6th century B.C. Shankaracharya, the exponent of Vedanta philosophy tried to organise the religion on some structural basis in the 7th century A.D. He established four monasteries in the four corners of India. The successive heads of these monasteries are considered leaders or interpreters even today.

Saint-poets of the middle ages practised and preached unification of Hindu society through their path of devotion for the people of all classes despite their castes or creed.

In modern times, various social and religious reformers have rejuvenated the Hindu religion through reforms orientated towards reorganising religious practice to suit modern conditions. Brahma Samaj (Society of believers in one creator) in Bengal, Prarthana Samaj (Society for common prayer) in Arya Samaj (Society for Reawakening of Mumbai Vedic path) in north India and the Theosophical Society in Chennai started such reform movements in the last century. Swami Vivekananda, the exponent of modern Hinduism started the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 on behalf of Hinduism started the Ramakrishna Mission in the name of his guru to provide educational and social services. After Independence, the Government of India passed the Hindu Code Bill upgrading the family law abolishing polygamy and sanctioning divorce and remarriage.

India is a multicultural and multilingual society like Europe and has achieved 'unity in diversity' through the common thread of Hindu culture. The basic principle of equality of all religions is manifested in the presence of all religions and creeds in India for centuries. One of the Vedic Prayers seeks the welfare of all:

***“May all be happy everywhere,
May all be free from any disease.
May all behold good and
May sorrow not fall to the lot of anyone.”***
(Chintaman Datar, Hindu Priest)

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Islam

What is Islam?

Islam is not a new religion, but the same truth that God revealed through all His prophets to every people. For a fifth of the world's population, Islam is both a religion and a complete way of life. Muslims follow a religion of peace, mercy, and forgiveness, and the majority have nothing to do with the extremely grave events which have come to be associated with their faith.

What are the Muslims?

One billion people from a vast range of races, nationalities and cultures across the globe - from the southern Philippines to Nigeria - are united by their common Islamic faith. About 18% live in the Arab world; the world's largest Muslim community is in Indonesia; substantial parts of Asia and most of Africa are Muslim, while significant minorities are to be found in the Soviet Union, China, North and South America and Europe and recently in Australia.

What do the Muslims believe?

Muslims believe in One, Unique, Incomparable God; in the Angels created by Him; in the prophets through whom His revelations were brought to mankind; in the Day of Judgement and individual accountability for actions; in God's complete authority over human destiny and in life after death. Muslims believe in a chain of prophets starting with Adam and including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Issac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elias, Jonah, John the Baptist, and Jesus, peace be upon them. But God's final message to man, a reconfirmation of the eternal message and a summing-up of all that has gone before was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. (peace be upon him); through Gabriel.

How does someone become a Muslim?

Simply by saying "there is no god apart from God, and Muhammad S.A.W. is the Messenger of God". "By this declaration the believer announces his or her faith in all God's messengers, and the scriptures they brought.

What does 'Islam' mean?

The Arabic word 'Islam' simply means submission, and derives from a word meaning 'peace'. In a religious context it means complete submission to the will of God. 'Mohammedanism' is thus a misnomer (not the correct name for the faith).

Why does Islam often seem strange?

Islam may seem exotic or even extreme in the modern world. Perhaps this is because religion does not dominate everyday life in the West today, whereas Muslims have religion always uppermost in their minds, and make no division between secular and sacred. They believe that the Divine Law, the Shari'a, should be taken very seriously, which is why issues related to religion are still so important.

Do Islam and Christianity have different origins?

No. Together with Judaism, they go back to the prophet and patriarch Abraham, and their three prophets are directly descended from his sons - Muhammad S.A.W. from the eldest, Ishmael and Moses and Jesus S.A.W. from Issac. Abraham established the settlement which today is the city of Makkah, and built the Ka'ba towards which all Muslims turn when they pray.

Islam (cont.)

What is the Ka'ba?

The Ka'ba is the place of worship which God commanded Abraham and Ishmael to build over four thousand years ago. The building was constructed of stone on what many believe was the original site of a sanctuary established by Adam. God commanded Abraham to summon all mankind to visit this place, and when pilgrims go there today they say 'At Thy Service, O Lord', in response to Abraham's summons.

Who is Muhhamad S.A.W.?

Muhhamad S.A.W. was born in Makkah in the year 570, at a time when Christianity was not yet fully established in Europe. Since his father died before his birth, and his mother shortly afterwards, he was raised by his uncle from the respected tribe Quraysh. As he grew up, he became known for his truthfulness, generosity and sincerity, so that he was sought after for his ability to arbitrate in disputes. The historians describe him as calm and meditative.

Muhammad S.A.W. was of a deeply religious nature, and had long detested the decadence of his society. It became his habit to meditate from time to time in the Cave of Hira near the summit of Jabal al-Nur. The 'Mountain of Light' near Makkah.

How did he become a prophet and a messenger of God?

At the age of 40, while engaged in a meditative retreat, Muhammad S.A.W. received his first revelation from God through the angel Gabriel. This revelation, which continued for twenty-three years, is known as the Qur'an.

As soon as he began to recite the words he heard from Gabriel, and to preach the truth which God had revealed to him, he and his small group of followers suffered bitter persecution, which grew so fierce that in the year 622 God gave them the command to emigrate. This event, the Hijra 'migration', in which they left Makkah for the city of Madihnah some 260 miles to the north, marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

After several years, the Prophet S.A.W. and his followers were able to return to Makka, where they forgave their enemies and established Islam definitively. Before the Prophet S.A.W. died at the age of 63, the greater part of Arabia was Muslim, and within a century of his death Islam had spread to Spain in the West and as far East as China.

How did the spread of Islam affect the world?

Among the reasons for the rapid and peaceful spread of Islam was the simplicity of its doctrine - Islam calls for faith in only One God worthy of worship. It also repeatedly instructs man to use his powers of intelligence and observation.

Within a few years, great civilisations and universities were flourishing, for according to the Prophet S.A.W. 'seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim man and woman'. The synthesis of Eastern and Western ideas and of new thought with old, brought about great advances in medicine, mathematics, physics, astronomy, geography, architecture, art, literature, and history. Many crucial systems such as algebra, the Arabic numerals, and also the concept of zero (vital to the advancement of mathematics), were transmitted to medieval Europe from Islam. Sophisticated instruments which were to make possible the European voyages of discovery were developed, including the astrolabe, the quadrant and good navigational maps.

What is the Qur'an?

The Qur'an is a record of the exact words revealed by God through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. It was memorised by Muhammad S.A.W. and then dictated to his companions, and written by scribes, who cross-checked it during his lifetime. Not one word of its 114 chapters, Suras, has been changed over the centuries, so that the Qur'an is in every detail the unique and miraculous text which was revealed to Muhammad S.A.W. fourteen centuries ago.

What is the Qur'an about?

The Qur'an, the last revealed word of God, is the prime source of every Muslim's faith and practice. It deals with all the subjects which concern us as human beings; wisdom, doctrine, worship, and law, but its basic theme is the relationship between God and His creatures. At the same time it provides guidelines for a just society, proper human conduct and an equitable economic system.

Are there any other sacred sources?

Yes, the sunna, the practice and example of the Prophet S.A.W., is the second authority for Muslims. A hadith is a reliably transmitted report of what the Prophet S.A.W. said, did, or approved. Belief in the sunna is part of the Islamic faith.

Examples of the Prophet's saying

“God has no mercy on one who has no mercy for others.”

“None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.”

“He who eats his fill while his neighbour goes without food is not a believer.”

“The truthful and trusty businessman is associated with the prophets, the saints and the martyrs.”

“Powerful is not he who knocks the other down, indeed powerful is he who controls himself in a fit of anger.”

“God does not judge according to your bodies and appearances but he scans your heart and looks into your deeds.”

“A man walking along a path felt very thirsty. Reaching a well he descended into it, drank his fill and came up. Then he saw a dog with its tongue hanging out, trying to lick up mud to quench its thirst. The man saw that the dog was feeling the same thirst as he had felt

so he went down into the well again and filled his shoe with water and gave the dog a drink. God forgave his sins for his actions.” The prophet S.A.W. was asked: “Messenger of God, are we rewarded for kindness towards animals?” He said, “There is a reward for kindness to every living thing.”

From the hadith collections of Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi and Bayhaqi.

What are the “Five Pillars” of Islam?

They are the framework of the Muslim life; faith; prayer, concern for the needy, self purification and the pilgrimage to Makkah for those who are able.

1. Faith

There is no god worthy of worship except God and Muhammad is His messenger. This declaration of faith is called the Shahada, a simple formula which all the faithful pronounce. In Arabic, the first part is *la ilaha ill Allah* - “there is no god except God”, *ilaha* (god) can refer to anything which we may be tempted to put in place of God - wealth, power, and the like. Then come *ill Allah*: “except God” the source of all Creation. The second part of the Shahada is *Muhammadun raul Allah*: “Muhammad is the messenger of God”. A message of guidance has come through a man like ourselves.

2. Prayer

Salah is the name for the obligatory prayers which are performed five times a day, and are a direct link between the worshipper and God. There is no hierarchal authority in Islam, and no priests, so the prayers are led by a learned person who knows the Qur'an, chosen by the congregation. The official leader of community and of prayer is an Imam, (he receives training in theological schools and universities). These five prayers contain verse from the Qur'an, and are said in Arabic, the language of the Revelation, but personal supplication, can be offered in one's own language.

Prayers are said at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and nightfall, and thus determine the rhythm of the entire day. Although it is preferable

Islam (cont.)

to worship together in a mosque, a Muslim may pray almost anywhere, such as in fields, offices, factories and universities. Visitors to the Muslim world are struck by the centrality of the prayers in daily life.

3. The 'Zakah'

One of the most important principles of Islam is that all things belong to God, and wealth is therefore held by human beings in trust. The word *zakah* means both 'purification' and 'growth'. Our possessions are purified by setting aside a proportion for those in need, and, like the pruning of plants, this cutting back balances and encourages new growth. Each Muslim calculates his or her own *zakah* individually. For most purposes this involves the payment each year of two and a half percent of one's capital.

A pious person may also give as much as he or she pleases as sadaqa and does so preferably in secret. Although this word can be translated as 'voluntary charity' it has a wider meaning. The Prophet S.A.W. said 'even meeting your brother with a cheerful face is charity.'

The Prophet S.A.W. said: 'Charity is a necessity for every Muslim.' He was asked: 'What if a person has nothing?' The Prophet replied 'He should work with his own hands for his benefit and then give something out of such earnings in charity. 'The Companions asked: 'What if he lacks that also?' The Prophet said 'He should check himself from doing evil. That is also charity.'

4. The Fast

Every year in the month of Ramadan, all Muslims fast from first light (dawn) until sundown, abstaining from food, drink and sexual relations. Those who are sick, elderly, or on a journey and women who are pregnant or nursing are permitted to break the fast and make an equal number of days later in the year. If they are physically unable to do this, they must feed a needy person for every day missed. Children begin to fast (and to observe the prayer) from puberty, although many start earlier.

Although the fast is most beneficial to health, it is regarded principally as a method of self-purification. By cutting oneself off from worldly comforts, even for a short time, a fasting person gains true sympathy with those who go hungry as well as growth in one's spiritual life.

5. Pilgrimage (Hajj)

The annual pilgrimage to Makkah – the *Hajj* – is an obligation only for those who are physically and financially able to perform it once in their lifetime. Nevertheless, about two million people go to Makkah each year from every corner of the globe, providing a unique opportunity for those of different nations to meet one another. Although Makkah is always filled with visitors, the annual *Hajj* begins in the twelfth month of the Islamic year (which is lunar, not solar, so that *Hajj* and Ramadan fall sometimes in summer, sometimes in winter). Pilgrims wear special clothes; simple garments which strip away distinctions of class and culture, so that all stand equal before God.

The rites of the *Hajj*, which are of Abrahamic origin, include circling the Ka'ba seven times, and going seven times between the mountains of Safa and Marwa as did Hagar during her search for water. Then pilgrims stand together on the wide plain of Arafat and join in prayers for God's forgiveness, in what is often thought as a preview of the Last Judgement.

In previous centuries the *Hajj* was an arduous undertaking. Today, however, Saudi Arabia provides millions of people with water, modern transport, and the most up-to-date health facilities.

The end of the *Hajj* is marked by a festival, the *Eid-al-Adha*, which is celebrated with prayers and the exchange of gifts in Muslim communities everywhere. This, and the *Eid-al-Fitr*, a feast-day commemorating the end of Ramadan, are the main festivals of the Muslim calendar.

Does Islam tolerate other beliefs?

As for such [of the unbelievers] as do not fight against you on account of [your] faith, and neither drive you forth from your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness and to behave towards them with full equity: for, verily, God loves those who act equitably.

(Qur'an, 60-8)

It is one function of Islamic law to protect the privileged status of minorities, and that is why non-Muslim places of worship have flourished all over the Islamic world. History provides many

examples of Muslim tolerance towards other faiths: when the caliph Omar entered Jerusalem in year 634, Islam granted freedom of worship to all religious communities in the city.

Islamic law also permits non Muslim minorities to set up their own courts, which implement family laws drawn up by the minorities themselves.

What do Muslims think about Jesus?

Muslims respect and revere Jesus S.A.W. and await his Second Coming. They consider him one of the greatest of God's messengers to mankind. A Muslim never refers to him simply as 'Jesus' but always adds the phrase 'peace be upon him'. The Qur'an confirms his virgin birth (a chapter of the Quran is entitled 'Mary'), and Mary is considered the purest woman in all creation. The Qur'an describes the Annunciation as follows:

'Behold!'" the Angel said, "God has chosen you, and purified you, and chosen you above the women of all nations. O Mary, God gives you good news of a word from Him, whose name, shall be the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, honoured in this world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near to God. He shall speak to the people from his cradle and immaturity, and shall be of the righteous."

She said: 'O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?' He said: "Even so; God creates what He will. When He decrees a thing, He says to it, "Be!" and it is.'

(Qur'an, 3:42-7)

Jesus S.A.W. was born miraculously through the same power which had brought Adam into being without a father:

Truly, the likeness of Jesus with God is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, and then said to him, 'Be!' and he was.

(Qur'an, 3:59)

During his prophetic mission Jesus performed many miracles. The Qur'an tells us that he said:

I have come to you with a sign from your Lord: I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it and it becomes a bird by God's leave. And I heal the blind, and the lepers, and I raise the dead by God's leave.

(Qur'an, 3:49)

Neither Muhammad S.A.W., nor Jesus S.A.W. came to change the basic doctrine of the belief in One God, brought by earlier prophets, but to confirm and renew it. In the Quran Jesus S.A.W. is reported as saying that he came:

To attest the law which was before me. And to make lawful to you part of what was forbidden you; I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, so fear God and obey Me.

(Qur'an, 3:50)

The Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. said:

Whoever believes there is no god but God, alone without partner, that Muhammad S.A.W. is His messenger, that Jesus is the servant and messenger of God, His word breathed into Mary and a spirit emanating from Him and that Paradise and Hell are true shall be received by God into Heaven.

(Hadith from Bukhari)

Why is the family so important to Muslims?

The family is the foundation of Islamic society. The peace and security offered by a stable family unit is greatly valued, and seen as essential for the spiritual growth of its members. A harmonious social order is created by the existence of extended families; children are treasured, and rarely leave home until they marry.

What about Muslim women?

Islam sees a woman, whether single or married, as an individual in her own right, with the right to own and dispose of her property and earnings. A marriage dowry is given by the groom to the bride for her own personal use, and she keeps her

Islam (cont.)

own family name rather than taking her husband's.

Both men and women are expected to dress in a way which is modest and dignified; the traditions of female dress found in some Muslim countries are often the expression of local customs.

The Messenger of God S.A.W. said:

'The most perfect in faith amongst believers is he who is best in a manner and kindest to his wife.'

Can a Muslim have more than one wife?

The religion of Islam was revealed for all societies and all times and so accommodates widely differing social requirements. Circumstances may warrant the taking of another wife but the right is granted, according to the Qur'an, only on condition that the husband is scrupulously fair.

Is Islamic marriage like Christian marriage?

A Muslim marriage is not a 'sacrament', but a simple, legal agreement in which either partner is free to include conditions. Marriage customs thus vary widely from country to country. As a result, divorce is not common, although it is not forbidden as a last resort. According to Islam, no Muslim girl can be forced to marry against her will: Her parents may simply suggest young men they think may be suitable.

How do Muslims treat the elderly?

In the Islamic world there are no old people's homes. The strain for caring for one's parents in the most difficult time of their lives is considered an honour and blessing, and an opportunity for great spiritual growth. God asks that we not only pray for our parents, but act with limitless compassion, remembering that when we were helpless children they preferred us to themselves. Mothers are particularly honoured: The Prophet S.A.W. taught that "Paradise lies at the feet of mothers." When they reach old age, Muslim parents are treated mercifully, with the same kindness and selflessness.

In Islam, serving one's parents is a duty second only to prayer, and it is their right to expect it. It is considered despicable to express any irritation, when, though no fault of their own, the old become difficult.

The Qur'an says:

Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him, and be kind to parents. If either or both of them reach old age with you, do not say 'uf'f' to them or chide them, but speak to them in terms of honour and kindness. Treat them with humility, and say, "My Lord! Have mercy on them, for they did care for me when I was little."

(Qur'an, 17:23-24)

How do Muslims view death?

Like Jews and Christians, Muslims believe that the present life is only a trial preparation for the next realm of existence. Basic articles of faith include: The Day of Judgement, resurrection, Heaven and Hell. When a Muslim dies he or she is washed, usually by a family member, wrapped in a clean white cloth, and buried with a simple prayer preferably the same day. Muslims consider this one of the final services they can do for their relatives and an opportunity to remember their own brief existence here on earth. The Prophet S.A.W. taught that three things can continue to help a person even after death; charity which he had given, knowledge which he had taught and prayers on their behalf by a righteous child.

What does Islam say about war?

Like Christianity, Islam permits fighting in self defence, in defence of religion, or on the part of those who have been expelled forcibly from their homes. It lays down strict rules of combat which include prohibitions against harming civilians and destroying crops, trees and livestock. As Muslims see it, injustice would be triumphant in the world if good men were not prepared to risk their lives in a righteous cause. The Qur'an says:

Fight in the cause of God against those who fight you, but do not transgress limits. God does not love transgressors.

(Qur'an 2:190)

If they seek peace, then seek your peace. And trust in God for He is the One that heareth and knoweth all things.

(Qur'an 8:61)

War, therefore, is the last resort, and is subject to the rigorous conditions laid down by the sacred law. The term jihad literally means “struggle” and Muslims believe that here are two kinds of jihad. The other is the inner struggle which everyone wages against egotistic desires, for the sake of attaining inner peace.

What about food?

Although much simpler than the dietary law followed by Jews and the early Christians, the code which Muslims observe forbids the consumption of pig meat or any kind of intoxicating drink. The Prophet taught that ‘your body has rights over you’, and the consumption of wholesome food and the leading of a healthy lifestyle are seen as religious - obligations.

The Prophet S.A.W. said:

“Ask God for certainty (of faith) and well-being; for after certainty, no one is given any gift better than health!”

How does Islam guarantee human rights?

Freedom of conscience is laid down by the Qur'an itself:

“There is no compulsion in religion.”
(Qur'an 92:256)

The life and property of all citizens in an Islamic state are considered sacred whether a person is Muslim or not.

Racism is incomprehensible to Muslims, for the Qur'an speaks of human equality in the following terms:

O mankind! We created you from a single soul, male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Truly, the most honoured

of you in God's sight is the greatest of you in piety. God is All-Knowing, All-Aware.
(Qur'an 49:13)

What the Holy Qur'an says?

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects Evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy handhold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things.

(Qur'an 2:256)

Invite (all) to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: For your Lord knows best who have strayed from His path, and who receive guidance.
(Qur'an 16:125)

Say: ‘O ye men! Now truth has reached you from your Lord! Those who receive guidance, do so for the good of their own souls; those who stray, do so to their own loss; and I am not (set) over you to arrange your affairs.’

Follow the inspiration sent unto you, and be patient and constant, till Allah decides: for He is the Best to decide.
(Qur'an 10:108-109)

Nor can Goodness and Evil be equal. Repel (Evil) with what is better; then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate!
(Qur'an 41:34)

(They are) those who, if we establish them in the land, establish regular prayer and give regular charity, enjoin the right and forbid wrong: with Allah rests the end (and decision) of (all) affairs.
(Qur'an 22:41)

Please visit the Interfaith Network's website for further information www.interfaithnetwork.org.au
- see links

Judaism

Jewish people have been citizens of many Western countries and have had a presence in Australia since the First Fleet and have been a significant component of Australia's population ever since.

However, long standing and on-going prejudice and stereotyping of Jews, which is blatantly racist, has biblical, historical, cultural and sociological origins. The heightening of conflict in the Middle East resulted in harassment and attacks on Jewish individuals and institutions even though they may have had no connection with those events.

To describe the Jews as a race is a major inaccuracy. The Jews, Israelites or Hebrews as they have been also known throughout their four thousand year history began as a branch of the Semetic people, which included Canaanites, Syrians, Phoenicians etc. But for the last nineteen hundred years they have been scattered over many parts of the world and have lived amongst many other people and cultures.

To be Jewish in an identity of both religion and birth. Anyone who believes in the Jewish God, obeys the religious laws and follows Jewish traditions can be a Jew. So also anyone whose mother was Jewish is considered Jewish. It is therefore more accurate to describe Jews as a people for this includes both those with religious beliefs and those who are aware of their Jewish roots but do not practise the religion.

Jewish Australians throughout our history have played a significant role in the development of our civic, commercial and intellectual life. It is important that teachers continue to remind students of the different cultural and religious backgrounds and contributions of all people in our society.

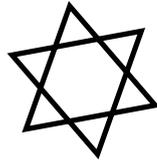
Historical Background

The story of the Jewish people began about four thousand years ago in the Middle East with Abraham, who was told by God to teach that there is only one God Yahweh, who created the world and is the only true God. Abraham's covenant with God was continued by his descendants who became the twelve tribes of Israel, the people chosen by God to spread the monotheistic religion throughout the region. Many years later when famine forced the Israelite to go to Egypt and slavery, another leader emerged to lead them back to the land promised by God to Abraham. The story of Moses is recorded in the second book of the Bible (Exodus).

A succession of judges, prophets and kings who ruled the Israelites are described in further books of the Bible.

King David (1000 BCE) extended the kingdom of the Israelites and captured the City of Jerusalem and made it his capital. The Psalms of David are still used by Jews and Christians today. David's son King Solomon, built a great temple for the Ark which contained the books of Moses in Jerusalem and it became a religious and national shrine. After Solomon, the Israelites kingdom broke up, ten tribes forming the kingdom of Israel and two forming the kingdom of Judea.

From this period teachers such as Elijah and Isaiah struggled to have the people keep the covenant of Moses. Eventually the disunity allowed the Assyrians to overcome and enslave the Israelites, and later the Babylonians overran Judea, destroyed the temple and exiled the Jews.



The Judeans kept their religion alive, reestablished Jewish life and later rebuilt the temple, only to have it destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. The Western Wall, all that remains of the second temple is still considered a holy place today.

A civil war and Roman invasion caused the Diaspora or dispersal of most of the Jews. Many settled in other parts of the Roman Empire in Europe and became known as the Ashkenazim (of Germanic influence), while those who settled in southern Europe, North Africa and the East were known as Sephardim (of Spanish influence).

Throughout the ages Jews were often savagely persecuted for their religion and most hoped to return to the Promised Land. A toast of Jewish gatherings is “next year in Jerusalem”. Throughout seven or eight centuries small numbers were able to fulfil this return. The rise of Zionism in the nineteenth century and mass migration of Jews escaping the horrors of the Nazis and European fascism culminated in the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. Jews came from all over the world to settle there. They joined small Jewish communities who had continued to live in Palestine but many of the Arab Palestinians were displaced, creating an ongoing conflict in the region.

Jewish communities have flourished throughout the world and lived under oppression at different times throughout their history. Harsh laws limiting ownership, occupations and so on, at various times did not destroy Jewish scholarship or culture. A religion based on a way of life, with strong personal and family observance has contributed to the survival of one of the world’s oldest religions.

The beliefs of Judaism

The following information is but a list of the elements of Jewish faith and readers are encouraged to refer to authoritative sources such as those listed in the Select Annotated Bibliography.

The Jewish belief is that there is one true God to worship, the creator of the universe, who listens to the prayers of all individuals and who assures a future eternal existence. The name of God is so holy it can never be spoken, so is referred to in many ways.

Judaism teaches that Jews must love God and respect all creation. Because God has given people the ability to do both good and evil this is a constant struggle for humanity. God will forgive sins if people are truly repentant.

An important Jewish teaching is the special relationship between God and the people chosen to receive his laws. This means Jews have special duties and obligations to perform to keep this covenant and to show others by example. Judaism is not a religion that actively seeks converts and it recognises that Christians and Muslims already share the same view of God.

Judaism’s sacred books tell of a future Redeemer or Messiah sent by God to bring peace to mankind. As there is still interpersonal violence, conflict and war, Jews believe the Messiah had not come yet.

The sacred books of Judaism have guided the Jews for centuries. The oldest sacred book the Tenach, sacred also to Christians (as the Old Testament) and to the Muslims. The first five books from the Torah scrolls, the revealed word of God, kept in the Ark of the Covenant in the synagogue. Part of

Judaism (cont.)

them is read each Sabbath. The Torah is the basis of the religion and the source of its faith.

Another group of holy books was written and compiled by the early Rabbis (scholars) from the second century CE and brought together in the Talmud in the fourth and fifth centuries CE. It covers almost every subject and is a legal code as well as a book of religious customs which has moulded Jewish life and thought.

Religious Observations of Judaism

The sacred building for the Jews is the synagogue, a house of prayer and study and a community centre. Services for the Sabbath, holy days, Bar Mitzvah, weddings and funerals are held there. The religious leader of the community is the Rabbi (teacher).

Jewish food laws are based on permitted (kosher) and forbidden flesh as listed in the Bible (Leviticus). Included among the latter are pork, shellfish and birds of prey. Animals for food must be killed humanely and meat and milk products must not be eaten together, for example a meat sandwich is not buttered.

Jewish males are circumcised on the eighth day in a ceremony of naming. On reaching the age of thirteen a male is accepted into the adult community in a ceremony, Bar Mitzvah, in which he reads a section of the Torah in Hebrew in the synagogue. Girls join the adult community in a ceremony at the age of twelve.

The holy day of the week, the Sabbath, which honours God and the wonder of creation, is observed from sunset on Friday evening until nightfall on Saturday evening. It is marked by services at the synagogue and a family meal. A Sabbath family ceremony called Kiddush involves blessing bread, drinking wine and blessing the day. A further family ritual marks the end of the Sabbath.

The Jewish Year

The Jewish year, based on a lunar-solar calendar, is marked by celebrations and commemorations of the history of the religion and commitments to God.

- Rosh Hashanah, New Year, is a solemn occasion celebrating the creation but also a day of judgement calling for all Jews to renew their covenant with God.
- Yom Kippur, the day of Atonement, the most solemn day of the Jewish calendar is a day of fasting and prayer for forgiveness.
- Succot, Feast of the Tabernacles, is a harvest festival including Simhat Torah, the Rejoicing of the Torah.
- Hannukah, the Festival of Lights, is a joyous historical festival celebrating Jewish survival in ancient Israel.
- Pesach, Passover, marks the escape from slavery in ancient Egypt and return to the Promised Land (Israel).
- Shavout, celebrates the receiving and acceptance of the Ten Commandments as the basic Constitution of the Jewish people.
- Purim, an historical festival, recalls the story of Esther and the salvation of the Jewish people in ancient Persia.

Jewish Settlement in Victoria

Jews from Britain were amongst the first European settlers in Australia and were the first non-Christian group in the colonies. The foundation stone for the first synagogue was laid in 1847. This was followed by the establishment of synagogues for communities in many parts of Victoria: Bendigo 1856, Geelong 1860, Ballarat 1861. The community was well represented with Members of Parliament and were active in civic life. John Levi was the first MP for St Kilda and his descendant was the Chief Minister of the Alma Road Temple Synagogue. Sir Isaac Isaacs, who had been born in the colony,

became the Governor General of Australia in 1931, after a distinguished career as a Member of Parliament and High Court Justice. A strong patriotism saw many Jewish ANZAC enlistments (442 from Victoria) including Sir John Monash, perhaps Australia's most famous general.

The original British origins of the Jewish community had been supplemented by Eastern European Jewish migration in the period before and after World War I. These Jews did not speak English and came to escape poverty and prejudice. They settled in working class Carlton and nearby suburbs in contrast to the well established families of British origin with established businesses and professions, but were soon part of the vibrant and hard-working Jewish community. Helena Rubinstein who came from Poland in 1891 who established a beauty salon in Melbourne and the creams and cosmetics she manufactured lead to a cosmetics industry which expanded to continental Europe and the United States of America. Another Russian immigrant, Sidney Myer, established his first drapery shop in Bendigo in 1900, which grew into the Myer Emporium in Bourke Street.

The period before and especially after the World War II brought further migration from Europe and cultural diversity and richness to the Jewish community. Melbourne's Jewish population rose from 8904 to 14 218 in 1974 and 23 448 in 1984 to 35 383 in 1996.

The Holocaust is a tragic reminder of an outcome of prejudice and racism and the families of thousands of Jews in Australia were destroyed in Europe during World War II. A permanent memorial to the victims of the Holocaust was erected in the Melbourne General Cemetery in 1962 and its victims remembered on Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day in April.

Jews have made, and continue to make, a significant contribution to all aspects of Australian life. For example, the painter Louis Kahan and the author Judah Waten were leaders in the arts in the post-World War era while Sir Zelman Cowen,

a preeminent academic before becoming Governor-General, and author David Martin carry the tradition in intellectual life.

Presented With Permission from:

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Ideas for Study Groups

- Read some of the stories of the Old Testament and discuss them as the history of the Jewish people. Make sure students are aware that these books are the sacred books of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.
- Read the story of Esther which is the basis of the Purim festival.
- Discuss the term anti-semitism for its original and current meaning.
- Investigate the observance of the various celebrations of the Jewish calendar.
- Study the history of the various solar and lunar calendars.
- Arrange a visit to the synagogue and a speaker to explain the building and its rituals.
- Arrange a visit to the Holocaust Centre, Jewish Museum.
- Research the history of well known Jewish figures in our community.
- Research common Jewish names and their biblical origins.
- Consider the implications of Jewish dietary restrictions in terms of community services, school canteens, travel services.

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Sikhism

Introduction

The Sikh religion was founded by Guru Nanak Dev who was born in 1469 at Nankana Sahib, near Lahore, (now in Pakistan). Guru Nanak (1469-1539) was moved by his own profound experience of God. He emphasised the absolute unity and sovereignty of God. He who created all things, and made all things, dependent on His Will or Hukam. He never appears in this world other than by reflections of His presence. He will, become known to us through the teachings of the Sikh Gurus.

The Sikh Gurus and their faith

Guru Nanak's conception of God is summed up in the Mool Mantra;

There is but One God

The Eternal Truth

The Creator, All-Pervading Divine Spirit

Without fear, without enmity

Immortal, unborn, self-existent

Known to us through the Grace of the Guru

Sikhs believe in the theory of transmigration.

Having passed through all of the lower forms of life they are now in the most developed stage of sentient beings - those able to help themselves.

We have been given self - will and a spiritual side to our nature. We are born in 'separation' and our objective is to gain 'union' with God - to attain bliss in this life. To achieve this, the Guru's way (path) is the shortest, quickest and most direct. To follow we need to become Sikhs of the Guru in love dedication and humility. Then Waheguru (Wonderful Lord) Himself will help us to change from Manmukh (man oriented) to Gurmukhs (Guru oriented). With God's Grace the rules of

karma will no longer apply. Our life target should be to attain Anand - Bliss before and after death.

To spread his message, Guru Nanak went on long tours throughout India and the Middle East, specially covering pilgrimage centres, where he told of his faith through discussions and (kirtan) hymn singing, He also set up centres of worship.

Guru Nanak stressed the values of spiritual life and the practice of Naam Simran (meditation) in his teachings. He also raised a strong voice against tyranny and the exploitation of the ordinary people by the Rulers and priests.

Guru Nanak gave concrete expression to his ideas on unity, equality and fraternity through the institution of sangat (congregation assembled for worship) and pangat (a line of devotees seated on the floor to eat meals from the community kitchen - langar). In his last days he settled at Kartarpur and nominated his successor Guru Angad.

Guru Angad (1539-1552) finalised and adopted the Gurmukhi script now used as a script for the Punjabi language by Sikhs. It is used exclusively in the Guru Granth Sahib - (Sikh scripture).

The third Guru, Guru Amar Das (1552-1574) set up a Sikh centre at Goindwal and organised missionaries. He condemned the practice of Hindu Sati in no uncertain terms. His famous hymn Anand Sahib (the Song of Bliss) is part of the daily Sikh prayers.

The fourth Guru, Guru Ram Das (1574-1581) founded the holy city of Amritsar and dug a tank which ultimately became part of Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple).



Guru Arjan Dev (1581-1606) constructed The Harmandir Sahib. Its foundation stone was laid by a Moslem saint, Mian Mir, who was a great friend of the Guru. It stands in the middle of (a water surround) The Amritsar. It has doors on all four sides symbolising that it is open to all creeds, classes and races of mankind. Guru Arjan also collected the hymns of the previous Sikh Gurus, and added to them some of his own and those of some Hindu and Muslim saints, to compile the *Adi Guru Granth Sahib* (The First Book of The Sikhs). Guru Arjan Dev was tortured and then martyred by the Moghul Emperor Jehangir.

Guru Hargobind (1606 - 1644) took up arms on his father's instructions. He wore two swords to signify the concepts of *miri* and *piri* (temporal and spiritual authority) Guru Hargobind built the *Akal Takht*, the Throne of The Immortal, and declared it the centre for the Sikh temporal authority.

Guru Har Rai (1644 - 1661), sent his son Ram Rai to Aurengzeb's court when summoned to answer questions on The *Adi Granth*. Ram Rai, to please the Emperor, reworded a sentence in the Scripture. This disqualified him from the Sikh path.

The eighth Guru, Guru Harkrishan (1661 - 1664) was a child when he succeeded to the Guruship. He is remembered in the daily prayer as "the one whose very sight dispels all miseries." He died of small pox at the age of eight. Before dying he gave a vital clue about His successor.

Guru Teg Bahadur (1664 - 1675) set up a new Sikh Centre at Anandpur. The Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb was carrying out forcible conversions to Islam. Many Brahmins from Kashmir were threatened with death unless they adopted Islam. Guru Teg Bahadur stood up for them and for the freedom of worship and was then beheaded on the orders of the Emperor Aurengzeb.

The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1675-1708) came into his own after the execution of his father and exemplified the Sikh ideal of saint-soldier. He was the founder of the Khalsa Panth (The Sikh way of Life)

Sikhs believe that all the Sikh Gurus inherited the spirit of Guru Nanak. In their compositions they all signed themselves as "Nanak" Before his death Guru Gobind Singh declared that the line of personal Sikh Gurus would end. That the authority of Guru would be vested in The *Guru Granth Sahib*, and the panth - the collective will of the community- through His system of *Panj Pyaras* (the five beloved ones).

The Guru Granth Sahib

The *Guru Granth Sahib* is the sacred Scripture of the Sikhs. It contains the compositions of the Sikh Gurus, panegyrics of the various bards who attended the Gurus, also some hymns of Hindu and Muslim saints. The cardinal principle of the Gurus and Saints whose writings find a place in the sacred writings of the Sikhs is the Unity in God and their confirmation of Sikh teachings.

Both the Sikh Gurus and the *Guru Granth Sahib* inspire reverence, because the *Gurbani* which they express, is the Word of Divine Truth. Guru Arjan who completed the *Adi Granth* bowed before the collection, which he had compiled and installed it in the newly built *Harmandir Sahib* in 1604. In so doing he was acknowledging the high authority of *Gurbani*; over his personal status as Guru. "The *Gurbani* is the Guru, and the Guru, *Gurbani*". (Guru Amar Das). So it is not the book but its contents, the *Gurshabad* (Divine Word) which is now the perpetual Guru of the Sikhs, which is being acknowledged by the bowing of the Sikhs, and it shall remain ever so.

Sikhism (cont.)

Some teachings of the Sikh faith

Concept of God.

Sikh religion is uncompromisingly monotheistic. According to the creedal statement with which Guru Granth Sahib begins, God is the only 'Absolute One', who created the entire universe. God's relationship with man is that of Creator and created. He is benevolent and looks after His creation lovingly, He is all love, He is, ineffable. His Will is altruistic. Everybody is subject to His Will.

Doctrines.

A basic doctrine of Sikh faith is that of the unity of the Guruship, i.e. that, all ten Gurus were one in spirit. Another doctrine is that Word is The Message is the real Guru, and not physical body. That explains the conferment of the Guruship to the Guru Granth Sahib, in which God's Word revealed through the Gurus is enshrined. The doctrine of miri - piri is based on the basic principle of the Sikh religion that the spiritual and temporal aspects of life cannot be separated. The Sikh doctrine proclaims freedom from caste bondage, from the shadows of past birth, superstitions, false notions of lineage, and the stigma of so-called low occupations.

Nature of the World.

Sikh religion believes the world to be real. Guru Nanak says, "Real are Thy continents, and universes. Real are the worlds and the forms created by Thee". Guru Arjan Dev says, "He is Real and True, so is His creation." Guru Nanak says, "The universe is the chamber of God. It is His abode."

Cosmology and Cosmogony.

Guru Nanak says, that there are hundreds of thousands of other worlds and universes. It is a futile exercise trying to guess their number.

Goal of life.

The Sikh ideal is to become a Gurmukh. One who wants salvation for all humanity along with themselves in this lifetime. They therefore discharge all of their social and political responsibilities, whole-heartedly. A Gurmukh is completely attuned to God's Will. His love for God is expressed in the form of altruistic deeds or service of mankind.

The Sikh Path.

The Sikh ideal is to be achievable through a householder's life. The Gurus preached that worldly activities are no hindrance to spiritual progress. Rather, they are complementary and essential to each other. One must always remember God; earn an honest living; and share with others.

The Truth.

The Guru says, "Truth is higher than everything. Higher still is truthful living or the practice of truth in life."

Emphasis on Deeds.

Love of God has to be translated into love of humanity. Love can be expressed only through altruistic deeds. Guru Nanak says, "Approval or rejection in the court of God is determined only on the basis of one's actions in this life."

Equality and Justice.

The Sikh religion does not sanction any discrimination based on caste, colour or sex. All humankind is of one brotherhood. God is the Father and all human beings are His children. The Sikh religion gives to women equality with men in all spheres: social, political or religious. Guru Nanak decries discrimination against women anywhere. He asks, "How can you call her inferior, who gives birth to kings?"

A Sikh should be just in his dealings with others. Dispense full justice when in authority, fight for justice to the oppressed, the downtrodden and the weak. For this, he should, be spiritually inspired and physically fit. A Sikh has to try to live as a saint-soldier.

Guru Nanak never claimed that only his disciples could get salvation. He stood guarantee for the entire humanity and said whosoever meditates upon one God, the Formless, will get salvation.

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa; Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh,

The Khalsa belongs to God; the Victory belongs to God

Please visit the Interfaith Network's website for further information www.interfaithnetwork.org.au - see links



Brahma Kumaris *Spiritual University*

The University was founded in 1936 in Karachi, Sindh (now part of Pakistan) by Prajapita Brahma. He was a business man who devoted his considerable wealth to the establishment of the University. Inspired by a series of revelations he dedicated the remaining 33 years of his life to bringing into reality his vision of people of all cultural, economic and religious backgrounds coming together to rediscover and develop the spiritual dimensions of their lives.

A University for the World

As an international university with around 4000 branches in over 77 countries, the Brahma Kumaris offer people of all backgrounds an opportunity to learn meditation and deepen their understanding of universal principles and innate values through a variety of educational programmes, courses and learning resources.

Learning for life

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University recognises the intrinsic spirituality and goodness of every human being and helps human beings rediscover that goodness within themselves, encouraging and facilitating the development of spiritual awareness, attitudes, behaviours and skills through the process of lifelong learning.

The foundation course in meditation

At the heart of the University's teachings is a clear understanding of the relationship between spirit and matter, mind and body, and the interplay between soul, God and our material world.

Meditation is taught as a method of raising self-awareness leading to self-realisation.

Self-realisation

Self-awareness is cultivated in order to realise one's true spiritual identity and nature. In the meditative state, the self is experienced as conscious energy taking the form of a point of light. This spiritual energy, the soul, is experienced as both different and separate from the energy of the material body.

The role of the mind, and the interplay between the mind, the intellect and the personality, is understood through a process of self-observation. The meditator learns to quieten and control the mind, allowing the conscience to be clearly heard. Conscious awareness of the soul is developed, allowing full understanding of the self.

Relationship with God

As meditation helps consciousness move beyond self limiting beliefs, the presence of God is experienced in the state of yoga a mental link with the source of spiritual power.

Courses and Seminars

Throughout the world the University's centres offer a variety of short courses, lectures and seminars which focus on the development of specific personal skills and qualities of character. Some of these include positive thinking, stress free living, self managing leadership and self esteem.

Brahma Kumaris Spiritual University (cont.)

Working with the United Nations World Headquarters

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University is a non-governmental organisation in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, and in consultative status with UNICEF. It is also affiliated with the Department of Public Information. The University's work supports UN programmes on a wide range of developmental, humanitarian and other issues.

Activities world-wide

The Brahma Kumaris centres play a significant role in the local community. Activities are designed to involve people in identifying and implementing the positive spiritual values, ethics and understanding necessary to improve the quality of family, community and professional life. All courses and activities are offered free of charge as a service to the community.

Working with the faith communities

For over twenty years, the University has given its support to the work of interreligious dialogue around the world. In many communities, Brahma Kumaris representatives serve on committees of local interfaith organisations, hosting and assisting with local activities, and taking an active part in religious education advisory committees.

The world headquarters are situated in Mt Abu, Rajasthan, India. Facilities include an auditorium with a capacity of 20000 people, fourteen seminar and training rooms and accommodation for up to 15000 people.

Centres in Australia

The University has a number of centres throughout the capital cities of Australia and three retreat centres - one in Melbourne and two in NSW. Retreats on a variety of topics ranging from learning how to meditate to stress free living are provided for the public. The retreat centres have a peaceful setting which enables spiritual exploration and also provide vegetarian meals as part of the experience.

Please visit the Interfaith Network's website for further information www.interfaithnetwork.org.au - see links.

The Sathya Sai



Organisation

Introduction

The Sathya Sai Organisation in Australia is part of a world wide non-sectarian spiritual organisation with members from a wide variety of religions and philosophical backgrounds. It is not a religion but rather a universal approach to life which stresses the practice of essential values on which we can all agree. The aim of the organisation is to encourage the spread of these common values, not by lip service, but by practice in daily life and in service to others.

Sai Baba says:

There is only ONE religion of Love.

There is only ONE language, the language of the heart.

There is only ONE caste, the caste of Humanity.

There is only ONE God, and He is omnipresent.

Objectives of the Sathya Sai Baba Organisation

- To help the individual become aware of the Divinity that is within, and conduct oneself accordingly.
- To ensure that all human relationships are governed by the principles of Truth, Right Conduct, Love, Peace and Non-Violence.
- To assist devotees of all religions to become more sincere and dedicated in the practice of their respective religions by concentrating on the essence of their religion.

Sai Baba's Mission

The mission of Sai Baba as a world teacher is the uniting of mankind into one family.

“I have come to light the lamp of Love in your hearts, to see that it shines day by day with added lustre. I have not come to speak on behalf of any religion. I have not come on any mission of publicity for any sect, creed or cause, nor have I come to collect followers for any doctrine. I have no plans to attract disciples or devotees into my fold or any fold. I have come to tell you of this universal Unitary Faith, this inner self principle, this Path of Love, this Righteousness of Love, this Duty of Love, this Obligation.”

Sai Baba

Sai Baba's Life

Sathya Sai Baba was born in Puttaparti, a small village in South India on November 23 1926. As a small child he demonstrated extraordinary qualities of compassion, generosity and wisdom. At the age of 14 he declared to his family and those around him, that his mission was to bring out the spiritual regeneration of humanity. Since 1950, his residence has been Prashanti Nilayam (the abode of perfect peace). His life is completely devoted to the fulfilment of his stated mission, and today, Prashanti Nilayam is a place where hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world gather to experience his loving and compassionate presence, his deep knowledge and wisdom.

Sai Baba's Achievements

Sai Baba's extraordinary achievements are today having a profound effect on both the spiritual and everyday lives of people everywhere. In the field of education he has built schools and universities throughout India. These combine the basic principles of human values with the highest level of academic standards and are free of charge.

The Sathya Sai Organisation (cont.)

Sai Baba is continually active in raising standards of health as can be seen by the building of new hospitals. These include the Super Specialty Hospital near His residence at Prashanti Nilayam, one of the finest medical institutions in the world where treatment of all patients is absolutely free.

Among the many large-scale humanitarian projects undertaken in partnership with the Indian Government is the Water Project, which is bringing fresh water for the first time to nearly six hundred villages.

Sai Baba's outstanding achievements are today being felt among people, not only in India, but world-wide.

Sai Baba Speaks

On Religion

'Let the different faiths exist, let them flourish and let the glory of God be sung in all languages and in a variety of tunes. That should be the ideal. Respect the differences between the faiths and recognise them as valid as long as they do not extinguish the flame of unity. If each person lives the ideals propounded by the founder of his religion, unaffected by greed or hate, then the world will be a happy and peaceful habitation for man.'

On Peace

'If there is righteousness in the heart there will be beauty in the character; If there is beauty in the character there will be harmony in the home; If there is harmony in the home there will be order in the nation; If there is order in the nation there will be peace in the world.'

Activities of the Sai Baba Organisation

The Sai Organisation has many Centres and Devotional Groups throughout most countries in the world. There are over 100 centres and groups

in Australia. Members from all religious and racial backgrounds regularly take part in three main activities which are carried out under the 'Wings' of the organisation.

Service Wing

A wide variety of activities is carried out in the general community including cooking and serving meals, collecting basic necessities for the needy and other activities including group singing in nursing homes.

Education Wing

Classes for adults and children are held on the basic tenets of Sai Baba's teachings which include the five human values of:

- **Truth**
- **Peace**
- **Love**
- **Right Conduct**
- **Non violence**

There is an emphasis on the ways these values can be practised in everyday life

Spiritual Wing

Regular weekly meetings for Devotional Singing (Bhajans) are held at various centres. Study circles are held where the teachings and philosophy of Sai Baba are discussed in depth. People have the opportunity to read, discuss and share their experiences in an atmosphere of love and acceptance. Retreats, conferences and workshops are held for members and any others who may be interested. Meditation is included in these meetings as it is pivotal in the search for the Divinity within us.

Other Groups in the Organisation

These include the *Womens Wing* and the *Youth Group*. Please visit the Interfaith Network's website for further information www.interfaithnetwork.org.au - see links.



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