

BASIC FAITH GROUP INFORMATION

Based on Multicultural Calendar 2004 Explanation of Religions
Creative Cultural Communications, 77 Harbour Square, Suite 202,
Toronto, ON, M5J 2S2 416/203-3595, 416/203-9682 fax
www.multiculturalcalendar.com

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Symbol: A Circle with indicators of the Four Cardinal Directions
extending from it.

The circle and four cardinal directions are: sacred objects, sacred feathers, sacred herbs and sacred art. Aboriginal peoples' religions represent examples of primal traditions that have existed for some 30,000 to 60,000 years. Due to their migrations across North America over successive time periods, generalizations regarding Aboriginal traditions are difficult to make. Differences among hundreds of tribal groups with their languages, together with contrasts of geography and climate to which the people have adapted, has resulted in specific ceremonies unique to each tribe. In no Aboriginal language is there a term that translates as "religion" and thus the term "tradition" is preferable. Basic Aboriginal concepts are grounded in the experience of time and process. Therefore, the seasons of nature are understood in a cyclical manner and sacred lore has developed an interrelation with the natural environment. Thus, the ending of the seasons for activities such as hunting, fishing and agricultural pursuits are celebrated through dance, song and recital of legends, mythical stories and clan histories.

Different tribes perform their ceremonies according to individual tribal time frames which impacts the dating and scheduling of the Aboriginal festivals.

BAHA'I FAITH

Symbol: A Nine-pointed Star.

The nine-pointed star is used to symbolize the teachings of the Baha'i Faith regarding the oneness of humanity and the oneness of religion.

The Baha'i Era began in 1844 with the declaration of the Bab (1819-1850) who claimed to be the forerunner of Baha'u'llah (1817-1892), the Promised One of all ages and religions. There are over 5 million Baha'i persons who are from virtually every ethnic group, culture, profession and social or economic class, and are from more than 235 countries of the world. The Baha'i World Center is located on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel. In the words of Baha'u'llah, the founder of the faith, "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

The Badi' calendar was established by the Bab. Based on the solar year, each year is divided into nineteen months of nineteen days each, with four intercalary days (five in a leap year). The Baha'i year begins on March 21 and the Baha'i day begins at sunset. Fasting season lasts 19 days beginning March 2. Baha'i holy days begin at sundown the day before the date calendared and end at sundown on the calendared date.

BUDDHISM

Symbol: An Eight-spoked Wheel.

The eight-spoked wheel represents the Eight-Fold Path which, when items of the Path are practiced together, enables a person to reach a state of equanimity and compassion.

The word buddha means 'one who has woken up.' Siddharta Gautama, the founder was born in India in the 6th Century BCE and, at the age of 35, gained enlightenment. Buddhism teaches that the way to Nirvana is through leading a moral life and meditating on the Eight-Fold Path. It is based on compassion for all living beings. Buddhist accept belief in reincarnation and karma, the result of good and evil actions. Buddhism coexists with indigenous religious traditions in adapting to local folk religions such as Hinduism, Confucianism, Shinto and Taoism. The three great traditions of Buddhism are distinct historically and geographically: Southern Buddhism, with 100 million followers who live in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia and Thailand; Eastern Buddhism practiced in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam; Northern Buddhism covers Tibet, Mongolia, the Himalayas and parts of the former Soviet Union. There is no single Buddhist calendar and events related to Buddha are celebrated at different times in different temples. The full moon is commonly recognized as the most important day for celebration.

CHRISTIANITY

Symbol: A Cross or Crucifix.

The Cross / Crucifix symbol is used to represent the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The term 'Christian' was first used in c. 35-40 AD in Antioch, Syria of a group of people who demonstrated attachment to 'Christos,' a Greek translation of the Hebrew term 'Messiah' used in Judaism. The Christian movement has produced a diversity of expressions, but allegiance to 'Christ,' Jesus the prophet-teacher, who began preaching at age 30, is crucial to them all. Jesus proclaimed the coming Kingdom of God here on earth and taught that the greatest commandments of the Bible are to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Sharpened by geographical isolation, five 'great traditions' of Christianity have developed. These may be identified as Eastern, Oriental, Latin, Northern and African. In most Christian communities, Sunday is the first day of the week and day of worship, although many minority groups, like Seventh-Day Adventists and many African churches, insist on a literal observance of the Ten Commandments and the special status of Saturday. The Gregorian (Western) calendar has been adopted by Western churches. Most Eastern churches use the Julian (Eastern) calendar for religious purposes, though only a few use it exclusively. At present, the Julian and Gregorian calendars are 13 days out of phase, with the Julian calendar later than the Gregorian.

HINDUISM

Symbol: A written representation of the word, OM, in Arabic script.

OM expresses the complete nature of God. 'Hindu' is a Persian word for people of the Indus Valley civilization. The earliest indicators of that civilization are derived from artifacts though to be between 4000 - 2200 BCE. Hinduism teaches that there is one ultimate reality or energy behind the universe, called Brahman. God also takes birth on earth as different Incarnations or Avatars. The same reality exists in human beings, who through reincarnation, ore repeated births, try to realize their unity with God. The word 'Hinduism' is used to refer to the complex religious tradition which has evolved in the Indian subcontinent and is represented by highly diverse beliefs and practices of over 500 million Hindus. Hinduism has no founder nor is it prophetic. No particular doctrine, dogma or practice is essential to it. The major scriptures of Hinduism are the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita. Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism arose within the Hindu tradition. Hinduism has been described as a religion of fasts, feasts and festivals. As with pilgrimage, festivals are local, regional and all-Indian. Festivals are connected with seasons as well as with major gods of Hinduism. Hindu festivals and holy days are based on a lunar calendar.

ISLAM

Symbol: A Crescent Moon with a Star between the two points of the crescent.

The Islamic crescent symbolizes the new moon that determines the Islamic calendar. For it's followers, Islam is a total way of life. Islam, which in Arabic means 'submission' (to God), proclaims a religious faith and sets forth certain rituals and prescribed patterns of order for society in matters of family life, law, food, business, dress and etiquette. There are five fundamental religious duties, called the Pillars of Islam, incumbent upon every Muslim. Muslims believe that God's final message was revealed to Muhammad (born approximately 570 AD) through the angel Gabriel, and is contained in the Qu'ran. With over 700 million Muslims, Islam is the second largest religious group in the world. There are over 72 sects, the major ones being the Sunnis and the Shi'ites. A group called Ismaelis, which arose sometime in the 9th century is led by the Aga Khan. The largest Islamic community is in the Indian subcontinent, followed by Southeast Asia and Indonesia; Arab countries; Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan; Sub-Sahara Africa; Russia and Chine; and Europe (Balkans). The times of observance of annual practices, notably Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca, are determined by the Islamic lunar calendar of 354 days.

JAINISM

Symbol: A Hand containing a Circle that has a Word in it under a Swastika which is below a Dot inside an Arc above Three Dots, all outlined with angular lines beneath which there is a Written Phrase.

The stylized hand is in a gesture of blessing. On the palm is inscribed "Ahimsa" which means 'non-injury.' The phrase at the bottom of the symbol translates "All life is bound by mutual support and interdependence."

Jainism is one of the oldest religions of the world. Jains take their name from the term 'Jina' which means 'conqueror' and is given to honour the twenty-four great teachers. Vardhamana Mahavira (599-527 BCE) was the last of the 24 Tirthankars or great teachers. Mahatma Ghandi's non-violent movement was based on Jain principle. The Jain philosophy encompasses the principle of non-violence, harmony through compassion towards all living beings, tolerance and forgiveness, and following a vegetarian diet. At present, the community includes approximately 10 million Jains (about one-half of one percent of India's population). Because of their philosophy of non-injury towards any living thing, most Jains are members of mercantile and professional classes.

JUDAISM

Symbol: The Star or Shield of David.

The 'Shield of David' has come to be the symbol of Judaism. Judaism is based on the covenant, or promise, made between God and the Jewish people. The covenant began with Abraham and was completed when God gave the Torah, or sacred law, to the Jewish people through Moses at Mount Sinai around 1300 BCE. The Torah is the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures.

Modern religious Jews, whether affiliated with an Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Reform or Liberal synagogue, are members of a faith community, which goes back some 4,000 years. Today, there are nearly 15 million Jews in the world, the biggest concentration being in the USA, followed by Israel and the former Soviet Union. The rest are scattered throughout the world, primarily in France, Britain, Canada, South America and South Africa.

The Jewish ritual year is a lunar year of twelve months. Each month begins with the appearance of the new moon. The year begins in late September/early October. Holy days begin at sundown the day before the date listed in the calendar and end at sundown on the listed date.

SIKHISM

Symbol: The Khanda depicts a double-edged sword enclosed in a circle that is bracketed by two kirpans (curved swords).

The Sikh symbol, known as the "Khanda," represents two basic principles of the faith: the need to balance temporal obligations with spiritual duties, and the duty of every Sikh to first serve those who are poor, oppressed, voiceless or disadvantaged in any way.

Sikhism began in 15th century Punjab, a land that now spans modern day India and Pakistan, with the simple message that there is One Creator, and therefore all people, regardless of gender, caste, race, colour, ethnicity or religious belief, are equal. Sikhs are unequivocally monotheistic and reject all forms of ritual, superstition and idol worship. They are guided by the teachings of Ten Teachers, the first being Nanak (1439-1539) and the last Gobind Singh (1666-1708). Their compositions, in poetry and set to music, constitute the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Scripture, also revered as the Living Teacher.

The word 'Sikh' literally means 'student' or 'one who is learning.' Sikhs are easily recognized by their turbans. Those who take on the full discipline adopt the five "K's.": Kangha (wooden comb); Kara (steel bracelet); Kirpan (sword); Kaccha (pair of shorts); Kesh (long hair). Today, Sikhism is the fifth largest world religion with more than 25 million adherents living mainly in Punjab, Hong Kong, Singapore and other Commonwealth countries. About 1.2 million Sikhs now call North America home. Since 1999, Sikh holidays have been demarcated in the new solar Nanakshahi calendar, which does not vary from year to year (as did the traditional lunar Bikarami calendar) and is now in accordance with the western calendar.

SHINTO

Symbol: A Torii is a gateway to a shrine.

The torii is the gateway to a Shinto shrine in which the ends of the horizontal bars are raised to reach toward heaven.

Shinto means 'Way of the Kami,' and is the oldest religion in Japan. The Shinto worship all the deities of Heaven and Earth and their belief is that the world is populated by millions of Kami, spirits that inhabit the natural world which is regarded with awe and respect and includes rocks, trees, heavenly bodies; the guardian deities; souls of ancestors, reknowned persons and incarnations of Buddha. Shinto ceremonies, dedicated to Kami, are held at shrines, in homes and in public processions and displays.

WICCA

Symbol: The Pentacle with five points enclosed in a circle.

The Pentacle is the most common symbol used in Wicca. It's five points symbolize Air, Fire, Water, Earth and Spirit in the circle of eternity. Wicca is the common term for many different traditions of Neo-Pagan nature religions that celebrate seasonal and life cycles, and revere a Goddess and a God. There are eight seasonal festivals called Sabbats: four Equinoxes and four agricultural and herd-farming times. The basic tenets are: worship of the Goddess in her three aspects, Maiden, Mother and Crone; worship of her consort Pan, the Horned God; the use of magic within a definite code of ethics, including the Wiccan rede, "And ye harm none, do what ye will"; reverence for nature and ecological principles; belief that the divine is in everything; that there are multiple deities and many different pathways to the divine; acceptance of reincarnation. Wiccans are found in Britain USA, Canada, Australia, Germany and Holland.

ZOROASTRIANISM

Symbol: Fravahsi, the divine essence and/or guardian angel is represented by a winged figure.

Fravashi, the divinity in humanity, is shown by a winged figure. The prophet Zarathustra lived in Persia around 1800 BCE. The Zoroastrians of India are called Parsis and follow the Shensai calendar. The Zoroastrians of in Iran follow the Fasli calendar. Zarathustra, in his Gathas or 'verses,' declared the sovereignty of the one God, Ahura Mazda, "Lord of All Wisdom," and the opposition of good and evil forces. Zoroastrian worship centres around a continually burning sacred fire.

Although prosperous, the community is numerically very small, residing primarily in India, Iran, England, Canada, Australia and the USA. There are seven obligatory holy days known as the six Gahambars (festivals) and Nowruz ('New Day') which celebrates the beginning of the year and is dedicated to the seventh creation, fire, the symbol of righteousness.