

JAIN ACADEMY PUBLICATION

MARRIAGE



Reflections & Understandings
from Nine Faiths in Britain



Editor
Dr Natubhai Shah



MARRIAGE

Reflections & Understandings from Nine Faiths in Britain



Jain Academy Project

Support by Awards for All



Charity Reg. No. 1018833

Jain Academy



Executive Editor : Dr Natubhai Shah
Assistant Editors : Dr Anna Sallnow & Ramesh Pattni

Contributors on Wedding Rituals:

Baha'i : Vicky Golestaneh and Gita Meshaki
Buddhist : Anil Goonewardene
Christian : Chrysoulla Nicolaou & Anna Sallnow
Hindu : Madhava Turumella & Prabhu Shastry,
Islamic : Dr M Raza-Muslim College
Jain : Dr Natubhai Shah
Jewish : Rabbi Bernd Koschland & Rabbi Alan Plancey
Sikh : Charanjit Ajitsingh
Zoroastrian : Ervad Rustom K Bhedwar

These materials can be freely reproduced for use in all educational and other similar organisations for non-profit purposes acknowledging the original source.

April 2010

Published by : Jain Academy 20 James Close, London NW11 9QX

Printed by : www.amrutprint.co.uk 020 8090 5040



FORWARD

By Hon. Barney Leith

(Chair Religions and Belief Consultative Group UK; Chair Faith Based Regeneration Network; Director Office of Public Information, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the UK)

Despite the growing numbers of couples in the UK who live together as if married, but who remain unmarried, marriage remains a sacred commitment for people of all the major faiths.

Marriage, say the teachings of my own Bahá'í faith, is a sacred and eternal bond. Other faiths express similar beliefs in different ways and through diverse practices and rituals.

Marriage provides an essential spiritual, moral and social framework for raising children to become faithful citizens and moral agents. These children will make noble contributions to the betterment of the world and will understand that human diversity, so essential to the richness of society, must be held together by acknowledging our common humanity and expressing our solidarity one with another.

It is increasingly likely in our multi faith society that a person of one faith may marry a spouse from another religion or tradition or world view. Such multi faith marriages face many challenges and the risk of lack of harmony between the partners and their families is, sadly, considerable.

The informative introduction included in this book and the chapters written by leading members of the UK's nine major faiths will help partners – intending and actual – and their families of different faiths or beliefs to overcome misunderstandings and to face the challenges.

And beyond the immediate needs of married couples or those intending to marry, the book will also assist faith communities, local authorities and schools to develop a better understanding of the importance of marriage and the meanings of the diverse and beautiful practices by which the faiths publicly cement the commitment of two people to each other.

I commend the initiative of the Jain Academy in compiling and publishing this book.

PREFACE



We are living in the real world, a world of technology and science, a world of communication and information, a world of media, a world of politicians and influential people, a world of real people and their struggle for existence, concern for the family, social life, their egoism, greed and struggle for power, possessions, money and fame. Most people are interested in mundane matters, pleasures and the apparent happiness obtained from material things. Because of their self-interest, people in general indulge in activities for short-term gain and do not worry about harm to other living beings, the environment, nature, their families, traditions or, ultimately, themselves. Modern education, ever increasing 'needs' in the name of a decent standard of living, a bombardment of sensational news, advertisements and information have changed the way people think. Except for a few, people have largely lost the values of their traditions, religion, spirituality, care for others and simple pleasures.

Discipline, respect and acceptance of the family values, teachings of the religion and of the educational institutions are in decline. Demographic changes, modern education, urbanisation, job and business opportunities, and the migration of many communities to the prosperous West have created a new situation. People come in contact with persons of different culture; make friendships and sometimes long lasting relations. The migrant younger generation are sandwiched between two cultures: culture of the West and the cultures of their own country; they come in contact with people of different cultures, fall in love and sometimes decide to have an intercultural or interfaith marriage without much preparation.

The aim of the publication is to give informed and contextualized information about marriage beliefs and customs in nine major world faiths, namely Baha'i, Buddhist, Christianity, Hindu, Islam, Jain, Judaism, Sikh and Zoroastrian, currently practised in Britain. The faiths are complex, dynamic and contain great diversity and traditions; this publication is only an introduction. All the faiths, their wedding ceremonies and rituals described in this book have a great variety of different ways of expressing their traditions. This is not a comprehensive account but a starting point and there is a great deal of material available on the internet and in detailed publications. However to get the information involves a great deal of searching and sometimes one does not get what one wishes. This is a first attempt to provide information for couples about nine world faiths and their customs and beliefs about marriage.

We thank all the contributors for their valuable time, assistant editors, Marilyn, Rajul Desai and others who have attended the meetings and made valuable suggestions. We also thank BBC and other media for referring their web pages and the useful publications on Families and marriage.

We are grateful to the 'Awards For All' for awarding the grant for this project and its publication. We also thank the trustees of the Jain Academy for their valuable support.

Natubhai Shah

22nd June 2010



CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION	07
--------------	----

CHAPTER 2

WEDDING RITUALS	14
-----------------	----

CHAPTER 3

BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS	56
---------------------	----

CHAPTER 4

REFERENCES	88
------------	----

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION





AIMS OF THE PUBLICATION

British society in the twenty first century has examples of many more cultures, traditions and faiths than was the case in the past. Over time there has been an increase in the number of interfaith and intercultural marriages. Most religions do not encourage this practice and so it is often very difficult for prospective couples to find accurate information about the marriage traditions and cultural expectations of different faiths. Anyone who marries a partner from a different religious or cultural background will encounter many issues that need to be considered. These can include the way of life and customs of different traditions, the expectations of how children should be raised, which religious traditions are to be followed and the relationship with the different families.

The aim of the publication is to give informed and contextualized information about marriage beliefs and customs in nine major world faiths, namely Baha'i, Buddhist, Christianity, Hindu, Islam, Jain, Judaism, Sikh and Zoroastrian, currently practised in Britain.

For this publication we have asked the leaders of these faiths to write about their own religious beliefs, wedding processes, rites, rituals, customs, celebration and pre-marital guidance for the prospective couples. These accounts are offered as a starting point and provide an outline and should not be regarded as definitive accounts of the individual religions. All religions are dynamic and often contain great diversity within them. Further material, references and contact details are provided at the end of the publication for additional study and research. We believe this publication undertaken by the Jain academy will be useful not only to the prospective couples, but will provide important information for use in schools, social services, local authorities and faith communities.

Marriage: An Introduction

For many people throughout the world, the aim of their lives is to have a happy marriage and to bring their children up to be responsible adults. Traditionally, marriage has been a bond between a man and woman that has included that most intimate of acts, sexual union, and the possible union of two families. In recent years this pattern has changed. Marriage is no longer the choice for some couples and others have opted for same - sex relationship but many religious faiths do not accept this phenomena.

How a partner is chosen also varies in that it can be by individual choice or by arranged marriage. In most countries both are practised. There are debates about arranged marriage and issues about personal freedom; however an arranged marriage is still the case for many couples in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.

Many Indian families who have settled outside India still uphold the tradition of arranged marriages. Often the most important aspect in arranged marriages is the bond between the

two families, their social status, and economic and cultural backgrounds. An important distinction needs to be made between arranged marriages that are consensual and marriages that are arranged without the consent of the individuals involved. These are sometimes called Forced Marriages and are against the law in most countries of the world. When asked to think of arranged marriage, many people visualize a forced marriage, in which the couple do not meet beforehand and have no say in the final decision and for the wife it is believed to be cruel and abusive.

Many young Indian people living in Britain still agree to an arranged marriage as to deny their parents this would be considered to be a sign of deep disrespect. Many families are able to discuss the issue and reach compromises that are acceptable for everyone. The more modern arranged marriage often involves negotiation between the parents of a bride or groom and the parents of multiple prospective spouses. The parents create a short list of spouses who they think would be good matches for their children, and introduce the children to each spouse individually, sometimes allowing them to have some time alone to talk. Ultimately, the children choose for themselves, although they choose from a list of parentally approved potential partners. However, if either party is not receptive to the idea of a marriage, negotiations are called off. These arranged marriages can result in a strong life-long partnership. In cultures where arranged marriage is still practised, parents regard marriage as a sacred duty, and want to ensure that their children are provided for happiness in the married life. They strive to make matches that please their children, and some couples in arranged marriages have said that while their partnership did not start out with love, the spouses grew affection for each other and form a committed team.

Since the 1990s, many young men and women both in Britain and in major Indian cities find a prospective bride or bridegroom through the process of a friendship or dating sometimes through matrimonial advertisement and then inform their parents of their mutual attraction. However, in the final decision, the families of the man and woman are definitely involved. Unlike in the West, they do not get engaged and then inform their families of the "good news."

When a person marries in the context of a Hindu (includes Jain, Buddhist, Sikh and others influenced by Hindu culture) family, he or she may literally wed an individual, but on a broader level a person marries into a family. Because a family is the embodiment of dharma, a prospective bride is considered a candidate only when the traditions, practices, and economic status of her family match that of the prospective bridegroom's family.

Failed marriage and divorce

In the Western world, nearly half of all first-time marriages end in divorce. The problems encountered in marriages are not limited to husbands and wives. The children experience the consequences of their parents' relationship – whether sound and strong or troubled or broken. Most religions teach that for a happy marriage respect and love need to be shown by both

partners. There are many arguments in the support of marriage. It is seen as an important institution that supports the development of strong and stable families. The statistical evidence suggests that children brought up by two parents do much better, on average than children brought up by just one.

Many supporters of arranged marriages say that the divorce rate is lower for these types of marriages, and use this as evidence to support the practice. However, divorce is not encouraged in many nations where arranged marriage is practised, and the couple may also be afraid to divorce because of social pressure, even though they may be unhappy. Ideally for a successful marriage the prospective partner will be someone with whom one can share interests and who will encourage one's independence. As with any relationship friendship is the key. Good communication from the beginning will help to ensure that yours is a lasting and beneficial partnership. Adjustment and learning together, showing respect and care for each other are the keys for successful marriage.

Hindu civil code permits divorce on certain grounds, but the religion as such does not approve divorce. According to Hinduism marriage is a sacred relationship, a divine covenant and a sacrament. Therefore it cannot be dissolved on some personal grounds. Other religions also permit divorce, but each faith has its own rules and regulations.

Married people have a greater life expectancy than single people

According to insurance statistics, married people of all ages have a greater life expectancy than single people. This being so, and if marriage is vital for the emotional development of our children and so deeply embedded in the fabric of human society after thousands of years of experience, why is it that so many marriages fail—especially in our highly enlightened age?

What creates a happy marriage?

One reason is that we often overlook the fact that successful marriages don't happen by chance. They happen only through constant effort—by persistently practising basic principles such as the following seven S-E-C-R-E-C-T-S (Courtesy Hopeway News letter).

S = Sort out roles

For a successful marriage, both partners need to spell out and agree on their individual roles and responsibilities. If both are working (especially full time), both need to share home duties (inside and out), and help care for the children.

E = Expectations that are real

Based on our backgrounds we all come into marriage with preconceived ideas of what it should be like. Our expectations, however, are often unreal; for a healthy relationship, marriage partners need to develop realistic expectations.

C = Commitment

Marriage is a commitment of one imperfect person to another imperfect person. Without this kind of commitment no marriage today can expect to survive.

R = Responsibility

Responsibility as well as commitment are two of our greatest needs in today's world. Each partner is responsible for his or her own happiness, reactions and feelings. Nobody else can make us happy. If we haven't found happiness before marriage, marriage won't provide it. Happiness is a by-product of maturity. For that, each one of us is responsible. Only happy people make happy marriages.

E = Effective communication

Another secret for any successful relationship is knowing how to communicate effectively. Effective communication is based on knowing our thoughts, desires, motives and feelings – being honest with them and expressing them creatively. People who deny or suppress their inner feelings and true desires fail to communicate effectively and can never discover true intimacy.

T = Time management

A child whose parents never spend sufficient time with him or her feels unwanted and unloved. It's the same with a marriage partner. Time – in quantity as well as quality – is needed for any wholesome relationship to flourish.

S = Spiritual commitment

Research has shown that families who are committed to a strong religious faith have a much greater chance of staying together.

Every marriage is unique and the rituals associated with marriages vary throughout the world and within individual religious traditions. Some marriages will involve the couple and a few witnesses others may include whole communities with hundreds of guests. However, at the heart of all marriages are the promises that each of the partners make to each other publicly. Indian marriages are often known for their opulence and vibrancy but in reality this is only the outward sign and underneath the outward gloss and glamour of the wedding ceremony are lifelong promises and commitments. Many religions in India regard marriage as more of a religious ritual than a social or legal affair. They are considered to be a perfect blend of traditions, values, celebrations and soulful affair of the merger of two souls and also beautiful display of love, concern, commitment, and emotion. Muslim wedding are also celebrated on a grand scale; Muslim families follow the traditional way of wedding, most of them follow the same customs and rituals in *Nikah* (wedding).

Opening and Closing Rituals in a wedding ceremony

In most weddings usually the music marks the beginning and end of the ceremony; the ringing of bells also indicates the beginning and / or ending of the ceremony. Before the ceremony begins the bride's family greets the groom and his family and enthusiastically welcomes them. In many cultures, it is the Godparents, or Aunts and Uncles who escort each partner to the altar, mandap or canopy for marriage. Parents, grandparents, godparents or other close relatives are honoured for their love and support by each partner during the ceremony. These special people can each be recognized with the gift of a flower, a corsage, a special poem or a simple hug and kiss.

The Wedding Canopy

The wedding canopy has become more popular with secular and interfaith couples as well, particularly with the outdoor weddings. The canopy represents the home the couple will make together. The wedding canopy is usually decorated with flowers. In the Hindu tradition, the canopy is called a "Mandap" and in the Hawaiian tradition, a "Kappa". The Finnish call it the "bridal sky". Danish couples may walk through an archway made of pine beech or oak branches, which represents entering their first home together.



Traditional Canopy



Indian Wedding Mandap

Special rituals in some wedding ceremonies

In certain traditions there are special rituals such as pebble ceremony or a "Glass Heart" Ceremony (wish for success of the marriage); wine and bread ceremonies (where wine symbolises sweetness of life) and breaking bread (symbolises the sharing throughout the lives together); unity candle, unity bouquet or sand ceremony (signifying their new life together as "One"); Salt ceremony (indicating a binding contract); Coins and Gift Giving (promise of financial support to the bride); Circling (may represent each partner making their spouse the

center of their world and also represents that marriage is a journey, and the first steps of the journey are taken together at the wedding).

There are other rituals such as

Food sharing ceremony (sweet foods symbolize the wish for a sweet marriage, special foods such as nuts and rice, as a symbol of fertility and other foods of "four flavours" representing the many different "flavours" of marriage);

The joining of the Hands Ceremony (an enduring symbol of marriage);

The Ring Ceremony (representing the covenant between partners and usually associated with the exchange of the wedding vows);

Exchange of items like white silk scarves (a Buddhist tradition) or leis (A Hawaiian tradition) or garlands of marigolds (Hindu, Sikh and Jain traditions).

Rose Ceremony (as a token of their love)

Handfasting or "Tying the Knot" (symbolic binding of hands or cloth in matrimony to signify the marital union)

Family Union Ceremony (exchange of gifts symbolising the unity of the two families)

The Tea Ceremony (representing the bride honouring her new in-laws)

Honouring the in-laws and close relatives by gifts and taking family photographs (signifying respect to the new enlarged family)

In some traditions there could be celebration with fireworks, and showering with rice grains or flower petals.

Reception

In most traditions a reception for family, relations and friends is held to celebrate the wedding. Some receptions could be lavish. At the reception the relatives and friends give gifts to the newlyweds.

The material in this booklet has been arranged under the following 'headings' however the emphasis in each religion varies and not all aspects hold the same degree of importance:

Marriage; Choosing a partner; Engagement ceremony; Pre-marriage rituals; Preparation for the wedding; invitations cards etc; Civil marriage; Wedding rituals promises and a Send off.

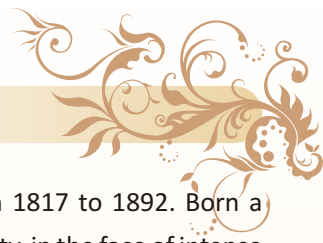
Also included in this booklet are individual faith descriptions with an outline of the main beliefs of each religion.

CHAPTER 2

WEDDING RITUALS



BAHÁ'Í WEDDINGS



The Faith's messenger and founder was Bahá'u'lláh, who lived from 1817 to 1892. Born a Persian nobleman in Tehran, he left a life of princely comfort and security, in the face of intense persecution and deprivation, to bring to humanity a new message of peace and unity.

The Bahá'í Teachings emphasize the importance of marriage and family life, both for the individuals involved and for society as a whole. Bahá'ís understand that the family is the basic unit of society and monogamous marriage between a man and a woman stands at the foundation of family life.



The Bahá'í World Centre – the building of the Universal House of Justice located in the twin cities of 'Akká and Haifa in northern Israel.

Bahá'ís believe in the institution of marriage and take it seriously. We believe it is an eternal spiritual relationship, an eternal bond between two souls.

"The Bahá'í marriage ceremony is quite simple and lends itself to virtually any culture"



"The true marriage of Bahá'ís is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God."

It is also a physical relationship and a friendship. A successful marriage should go a long way towards ensuring the health and happiness of husband and wife.

"Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart."

The couple must learn to live together in harmony, and to work together as a team. They should share their concerns and the events of their lives and always show affection to one another; neither has the right to impose their wishes on the other:

"There are, therefore, times when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other."

The Bahá'í teachings on the equal rights of men and women must be put into practice and the husband and wife must be absolutely faithful and loyal to each other, spiritually as well as physically. Most importantly, they should pray together, especially when they face problems or difficulties.

Apart from the spiritual, physical and intellectual companionship already described, the main purpose of marriage is the rearing of children. This is a very important and difficult task and a great responsibility.

While stating firmly that women must enjoy full equality with men. Bahá'u'lláh's teachings also recognize explicitly the differences between the feminine and masculine natures. Bahá'ís understand accordingly, that mothers have a special role to play in the early education of children – especially during the first few years of life, when the basic values and character of every individual are formed.

Education in general, and Bahá'í education in particular, is of great importance in Bahá'í families. From their earliest years, the children are encouraged to develop the habits of prayer and meditation and to acquire knowledge both intellectual and spiritual.

By understanding Bahá'u'lláh's teaching to eliminate prejudices, differences of race, religion and culture should not be allowed to become a problem in a marriage. The unity of mankind must begin with unity at the family level.

It is crucial to know every aspect of your partner's character.

A. Choosing a Partner

Bahá'u'lláh described marriage as a "fortress for well-being", the normal and healthy state for adults, where sexual feelings can be safely expressed in a spirit of love. Bahá'ís are expected to be completely chaste before marriage and totally faithful within marriage.

According to Bahá'í belief, the couple must be free to choose one another. The couple must:

"Exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever."

Their purpose must be this: to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity..."

Once decided, the couple must then obtain parental approval before they can marry. This ensures that they will have the support of both of their families, which is particularly helpful in times of trouble and also preserves the unity of the family. It also helps to ensure that their choice is the right one. They should realize that they must never refuse permission simply because of differences of, for instance, race, religion or background. When the parents give their wholehearted support to a marriage, it has a much greater chance of success.

B. Engagement ceremony

This is left to the couple's choice and can reflect the culture of the area or of the family. Bahá'í couples, however, are encouraged to have shorter engagements, often limited to three months. This is left to the discretion of the local administration (LSA) and guidance should be requested from them.

C. Pre-marriage rituals

There are no set pre-marriage rituals. This is left to the couple's choice and can reflect the culture of the area or of the families.

D. Preparation for the wedding

Preparation for the wedding is left to the couple's choice and can reflect the culture of the area or of the family. Couples are encouraged to set a foundation for their spiritual union by questioning one another on pertinent issues and by praying for divine guidance.

E. Civil marriage

In places where the Bahá'í marriage has no legal standing, the civil marriage ceremony should take place on the same day as the Bahá'í marriage ceremony. Your Local Spiritual Assembly (Bahá'í community) will be able to advise you.

F. The Marriage Ceremony (wedding ritual)

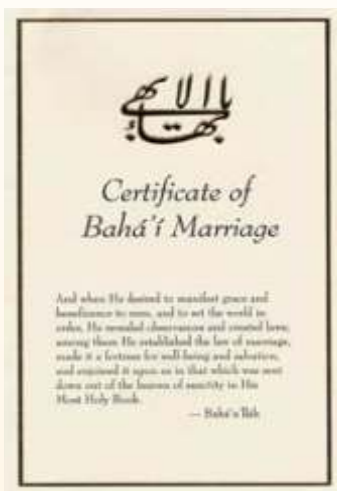
Once parental permission is obtained, the marriage should then ideally take place within 3 months. A Bahá'í marriage ceremony is prerequisite to Bahá'í marriage whether or not it is

recognized as legal by the state. The Bahá'í marriage ceremony itself is very simple and should remain free of dogmas and rituals. The bride and groom before two witnesses must state:

"We will all, verily, abide by the will of God."

For Bahá'ís, this simple commitment to live by God's will implies all of the commitments associated with marriage, including the promises to love, honor, and cherish; to care for each other regardless of material health or wealth; and to share with and serve each other.

The marriage vow is considered sacred in the Bahá'í Faith. When the wedding vows are made, usually the couple will choose prayers and readings from the Baha'i writings and other Holy sources for marriage to accompany this ceremony and will have their friends and relatives present at the ceremony too. The bride and groom will sign the Bahá'í marriage certificate, which is then signed by the two witnesses.



Beyond these simple requirements, Bahá'ís are free to design their own marriage celebration. Depending on personal tastes, family resources, and cultural traditions, Bahá'í ceremonies vary from small to large, and can include all manner of music, dance, dress, food and festivity.

A Bahá'í marriage ceremony should take place even if one partner is not a Bahá'í. If a Bahá'í marries someone of another religion, then it is permissible for ceremonies to be performed in both religions.

G. Send off

There is no set ritual for send off. This is left to the couple's choice and can reflect the culture of the area or the family.

BUDDHIST WEDDINGS



Buddhist wedding ceremony is simple and does not consist of any complicated rituals. Buddhist matrimonial customs and traditions are based on faith and not on religion. They basically require both the parties to make a commitment to each other that they will make a sincere effort to create a harmonious relationship.

Buddhist marriage ceremony is conducted in a very simple manner and only close friends and relatives are given invitation to attend it. Usually, it is presided over by the Buddhist lama (priest). Buddhist marriage generally takes place at the bride's residence. All the rites and rituals are followed, which include demanding the price of milk from the bride's mother by the bridegroom's family. After the completion of religious rites, the couple is declared as husband wife. The newlyweds leave for their home either on the same day or the next day.



Whereas in many religions (both Asian and western), marriage is a sacrament and an essential aspect of religious duty, marriage in Buddhism is purely a secular affair. A Buddhist's decision to wed is not affected by or intertwined with a desire to continue the Buddhist faith. Marriage is considered a personal concern; there are no religious directions on whether or not one should marry or remain unwed. There is also no formal wedding service. This does not, however, mean that Buddhist weddings do not have a rich tradition. Throughout the subcontinent, Buddhist communities have assembled creative wedding ceremonies out of Asian and Buddhist rituals.

Pre-Wedding Rituals

In the cultural pervasion of religion that all Asia has experienced, many Buddhist weddings are arranged. A wedding broker is normally responsible for the match between bride and groom. He or she will visit families of the area assessing their wealth, health, social status and prospects. When visiting families, the wedding broker can easily suggest a match for their child, having mentally catalogued the available people of the area.

A family will likely take the marriage broker's advice and pay a preliminary visit to the family of the person suggested. The parents of the two families will meet without the children to assess each other's prospect, checking the informational intelligence of the marriage broker. After several more visits, including one with an astrologer, the couple to be wed will meet and hopefully give the final okay to the wedding.



After having agreed upon a dowry amount, the astrologer will decide on a mutually auspicious date for the couple to wed. During the pre-wedding days, the couple may choose to receive monks in their new home. The monks will bless the house with holy water and recite verses from the Tipitaka (Buddhist holy book). As the monks complete their blessing, the groom's family will offer them alms (gifts) to bring good luck to the marriage.

The Wedding Ceremony

The wedding day is begun at a local temple where the couple separately asks for the blessings of Buddha. Both bride and groom are then dressed in outfits traditional to their region.

At the mutually auspicious astrologically designated wedding time, the bride and groom are individually taken to the shrine room of their local temple or a hall hired for the occasion. Here, the couple sees each other for the first time on that day.



Spiritual Buddhist wedding traditions don't necessarily require the presence of monks or the use of a temple's shrine room. For these traditions, the wedding location would be equipped with a shrine to Buddha featuring candles, flowers, incense and a statue or image of Buddha.

The ceremony begins as the entire assembly recites the Vandana, Tisarana and Pancasila readings. The couple then lights the candles and incense sticks surrounding Buddha's image and offers him the flowers within the shrine. Because of the secularity of Buddhist weddings, there is no assigned set of marriage vows. However, the bride and groom will recite their expected undertakings using the Sigilovdda Sutta as a guide. The Sigilovdda Sutta says:

"In five ways should a wife, as Western quarter, be ministered to by her husband: by respect, by courtesy, by faithfulness, by handing over authority to her, by providing her with ornaments. In these five ways does the wife minister to by her husband as the Western quarter, love him: her duties are well-performed by hospitality to kin of both, by faithfulness, by watching over the goods he brings and by skill and industry in discharging all business."

After these vows are spoken, the bride and groom can exchange rings. If monks are present, the marriage vows will be both preceded and proceeded by their chanting.

After the Wedding

Once officially married, the couple receives their guests with the huge feast and decorations prepared in the previous days to the wedding.



CHRISTIAN WEDDINGS

Christian religion sets a high value on marriage. The joining of a husband and wife in 'holy matrimony' is thought to reflect the union of Christ with his followers. Christians believe that in their love for each other, married couples will experience and learn from God's love for His creation. In the Gospels, Jesus taught that God's purpose was that marriage should be a lifelong and intimate union. In the Bible it states that:

'In the beginning, at the Creation, God made them male and female.

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be made

One with his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.'

The Church has recognised that not everyone is called to marriage, and from early times until the present day some groups have placed a high value on celibacy.

Generally Christians believe that there are three reasons for marriage:

- the right relationship for sexual intercourse
- the procreation of children
- the couple's mutual help and comfort in life.

In Britain, most Christians get married in a church service, although some may marry in a registry office.

A. Choosing a partner

In most Christian groups it is up to the individual to choose who they wish to marry. However, if the couple want to get married in a church, each Christian denomination will have their own rules.

B. Engagement ceremony

In most Christian denominations there is no set ceremony to mark an engagement and whilst it used to be the custom for the prospective husband to formally ask the bride's father for permission to marry his daughter, for many couples this is no longer the case.

C. Wedding Ceremony

There is a great deal of diversity within Christian marriage traditions. These will vary from those with many rituals to other groups who celebrate very simply. Two examples are included here one of the Orthodox Church and another Quaker wedding ceremony. One can find many more examples by help of the reference section at the end of the book. Two examples are included in this sections one which is marriage in the Orthodox tradition and the other a description of a Quaker marriage ceremony.

The orthodox marriage ceremony comprises of a series of stages that are deeply rooted in religious and social traditions and that have been preserved and honoured over time and another from wedding. Marriage is considered to be a sacrament and prayers are said for the blessing of the couple, their happiness and their lifelong union. I

Children hold lighted candles throughout the service. These candles are like the lamps of the five wise maidens of the Bible who having enough oil in their lamps, were able to receive the Bridegroom Christ when He came in the darkness of the night. The candles symbolise the spiritual willingness of the couple to receive Christ who will bless them through this sacrament. The lit candles symbolise the purity of the life of the bride and the groom that should shine with the light of virtue.



The religious ceremony comprises two parts:

- 1) The Betrothal Service
- 2) The Marriage Service

1) The Betrothal Service

This service begins with supplication for the peace of the whole world and for the couple who are being betrothed. This is followed by brief prayers and the exchange of the wedding rings.

The Wedding Rings

The rings are blessed by the priest who takes them in his hand and making the sign of the cross three times over the heads of the bride and groom, he says:

“The servant of God, [name], is betrothed to the maid of God, [name], in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

The priest places the rings on the fourth finger of the hand of the bride and groom and the best man then exchanges the rings with the maid of honour, taking the bride's ring and placing it on the groom's finger and vice versa. The exchange of the rings continues by all witnesses in turn and the Betrothal Service ends with a prayer that the Lord might make strong their betrothal in faith, truth and love and make them of one mind.



The rings are the symbol of betrothal from the most ancient times and the exchange of the rings symbolises the unbreakable bond of Christian Marriage. The exchange signifies that in married life the weaknesses of one partner will be compensated for by the strength of the other and the imperfections of one by the perfections of the other. By themselves, the newly betrothed are incomplete but together they are made whole. Thus the exchange of the rings gives expression

to the fact that the spouses in marriage will be constantly complementing each other.

2) The Marriage Service

The priest reads three prayers:

In the first prayer the priest asks God to give the couple the blessing necessary for happiness in their wedded life such as long and peaceful mutual love, health, children, understanding etc.

In the second prayer the priest asks God to 'preserve them to remind them and the parents who have nurtured them; the prayers of parents make firm the foundations of the home'.

In the third prayer the priest beseeches God to "Join these, thy servants, unite them in one mind and one flesh" that is to unite the bridal pair in harmony and marry them in one flesh.

The Joining of the Right Hand

At this time the couple's right hands are joined together by the priest and are kept joined throughout the service to symbolise the union coming from God and the "oneness of the couple".

The union of the couple is then completed with the Crowning, which is the climax of their wedding. The crowns are signs of the glory and honour with which God crowns them during the sacrament. The groom and the bride are crowned as the king and queen of their own little kingdom, the home, which they will rule with wisdom, justice and integrity. Some interpret the crowns to refer to the crowns of martyrdom since every true marriage involves immeasurable self-sacrifice on both sides.

The Crowning

The wreaths are tied together with a ribbon symbolising that the two are now one.

The wreaths also symbolise the bond between them and the glory and honour which the Church bestows to the man and the woman. The rite of Crowning is of such significance in the Orthodox Church that marriage is usually called 'stepsis' which means Crowning.

The priest takes the crowns and holds them above the couple's heads and says: "The servant of God, [name], is crowned to the maid of God [name], in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen". The priest does this three times and exchanges the crowns three times over the couple's heads.

The best man might also be asked to exchange the crowns over their heads as a witness to the sealing of the union.

The Crowning is then followed by the reading of St. Paul's Epistle to Ephesians (5:20-33) and St. John's Gospel (2:1-12). The Epistle refers to the mystery and holiness of Christian marriage and the duties and responsibilities of the husband and wife have to each other and the chanter usually chants it.

The Common Cup

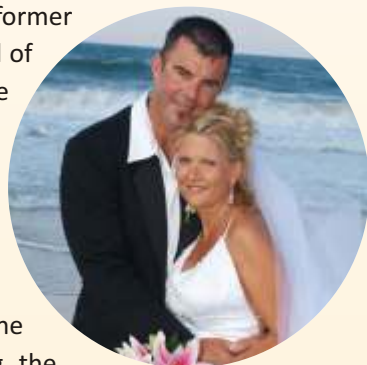
The priest reads the Gospel of the marriage at Cana of Galilee which was attended and blessed by Christ and in which He performed His first miracle. There He converted the water into wine and gave of it to the newlyweds. In remembrance of this blessing, a cup of wine is given to the couple from which each must drink three times. This is the 'Common Cup' of life denoting the mutual sharing of joy and sorrow, the token of a life of harmony. The drinking of wine from the common cup serves to impress upon the couple that from that moment on they will share everything in life, joy as well as sorrow and that they are to 'bear one another's burdens'. Their joys will be doubled and their sorrows halved because they will be shared.

Coming towards the end of the ceremony three beautiful and joyous hymns are chanted by the chanter or the priest. While the hymns are chanted the priest takes the bride and groom by the hand and leads them around a small table three times, the best man and maid of honour walking along them. This symbolises the first steps as a married couple and the Church, in the person of the priest, leading them in the way they must walk.

The Ceremonial Walk

On this table are placed the Gospel and the Cross, the former containing the word of God and the other being the symbol of our redemption by Jesus. By circling the table, the couple signify their oath to preserve their marriage forever and it expresses the fact that Christian living is a perfect orbit around the centre of life that is our Lord Jesus. In particular the circle symbolises eternity and the number of rotation around the table honours the Holy Spirit.

Finally, amid special words of blessing, the priest lifts the crowns from the heads of the newlyweds, thus ending the marriage ceremony.



The Quaker Wedding Ceremony

Quakers believe in the importance of marriage and the ceremonies are much more informal than in some other traditions. The couple make their vows without a priest. When the couple decide to marry they make a formal commitment in front of God and their family and friends. They believe that only God has the power to join a couple in matrimony.

As George Fox wrote in 1669:

'The right joining in marriage is the work of the Lord only, and not the priest's or magistrate's; for it is God's ordinance and not man's...we marry none; it is the Lord's work, and we are but witnesses'.

Quaker weddings must be held indoors but they do not need to take place in a registered building. Many couples choose a Quaker Meeting House but others may marry at home or in

another location. However, the celebration is community event and there is no set service but hymns and readings may be included.

If one of the couple is not a Quaker, or has been divorced, two adult members of the Society must give written permission before the marriage can take place.

The wedding day

Guests are usually met at the door and greeted.

The bride is not usually given away by her father. Neither is it usual to have a best man or bridesmaids.

Usually the bride and groom enter the meeting room together with their friends and quietly take their seats. They sit next to a table with the wedding certificate and a pen.

The clothes that are worn are smart but informal. The ceremony is generally held in silence and anyone who feels that they want to offer a prayer or speak is welcomed to do so.

Usually someone will begin by explaining what will happen in the service and this is often an elder from the, Quaker community.

There is usually a period of silence for about 10 to 15 minutes, after which the couple stand up and exchange their vows. There are traditional Quaker promises but the couple can modify them.

The couple will hold each other's hands and make a series of promises.

They will then be called by the officer who is to register their wedding to sign the register and two witnesses will also sign.

The certificate will be read aloud by the officer and this is followed by a period of silence. At the end of the service two elders will shake each other's hand and the rest of the community will do the same..

After the meeting the couple and the two witnesses sign the civil register and it is at this point that the couple often exchange wedding rings

Divorce and remarriage

Divorced people may be allowed to remarry if they receive the approval of the members of the monthly meeting. Quakers believe that people should be given a new chance in life.

From these two examples it can be seen that Christian marriage ceremonies have different structures and these depend on the beliefs and traditions of the particular denomination or group. For further information on other groups please look at the reference section.



HINDU WEDDINGS

THE HINDU VEDIC WEDDING CEREMONY

Hindu weddings are rich in their content and quite diversified. While the sacred vedic hymns that are chanted by the priests during the main Hindu wedding ceremony are the same, the pre-wedding ritual and some rituals within main wedding ceremony have regional variations in India and these are reflected in the Hindu wedding ceremonies in UK.

The ceremony is performed in the Sanskrit language, which is the sacred language of the Hindu ceremonies. The form of the ceremony was set approximately 35 centuries ago, and it continues to be followed to this day. The Hindu wedding is a religious and sacred occasion; the ceremony is performed reciting Veda mantras or sacred hymns, which play a key role in every step of the traditional Hindu marriage.

The pre-wedding rituals given below are prescribed by Sage Apastamba and Bhattiya, mainly practised in Southern India. The practice is slightly different in Northern India where mostly the prescriptions of Sage Gautama and Yaajnavalkya are followed.



Wedding Invitation Card

1. Pre-wedding rituals

Punyahavacanam (Purification ritual)

This ritual is performed to get peace, prosperity, progress and wealth. These are necessities of a successful life.

Muhurtam

Muhurtam determines the auspicious part of the day for the marriage. The period that is considered auspicious starts from 7.00 p.m. and goes on till the next day until about 11 am.

Preparing the Bride

This ceremony involves anointing the bride and the groom with oil and turmeric before bath. The couple don new clothes following the bath. The bride-to-be wears flowers in her hair. She adorns her forehead with a bindi or vermillion dot and wears bangles on her wrists.

After the recitation of Vedic verses, the groom pretends to leave for Kashi, a pilgrimage centre to devote himself to God and a life of prayer. He carries a walking stick and other bare essentials with him and implies that he is not interested in becoming a householder anymore. He relents and agrees to the marriage only after he is stopped and persuaded by the bride's brother to fulfill his responsibilities as a householder.

Mangala snaanam

The bride and groom must take a Mangala snaanam or an auspicious bath on the day of the wedding. The bath is believed to cleanse and purify them and make them ready for the sacred rites that are to follow.

Ganesh and Gauri pooja (Gauri Pooja is known as Ghari pooja in Sindhi Wedding rituals):

The bridegroom performs Ganesh pooja in the mandapam or wedding hall just before the marriage ceremony, worshipping the revered Ganesha who is the remover of all obstacles.

Gauri Pooja is performed by the Bride a few minutes before she enters into the main wedding hall and is symbolic of the protection offered by Goddess Gauri to protect the husband from worldly perils, requested by the bride during this special ritual.

2. Main Hindu wedding ritual

Step 1: Vaak Daanam

The groom-to-be (brahmachari) sends two elders on his behalf to the father of a girl whom he wishes to marry. The elders convey the message of the brahmachari and ask for the daughter's hand.

The two mantras in the form of brahmachari's appeal to intercede on his behalf where the first mantra begs the elders to proceed and return quickly with success back from their mission on his behalf and the second mantra asks for the gods' blessings for the elders' safe journey to the house of the father of the would-be-bride. The father accedes to the request of the elders and the resulting agreement for betrothal is known as vaak daanam.

Step 2: Vara Puja (Honouring the groom)

After accepting the request of the prospective groom, the bride's parents invite him to the wedding hall (mandap). Every Hindu householder believes that the daughter born to him is the personification of Goddess Lakshmi, consort of Lord Vishnu. So during this ritual the parents of the bride honour the groom as if Lord Vishnu himself arrived to take away their daughter.

The parents of the bride seat the groom facing the eastern direction and wash the feet of the future son-in-law, considering him as Lord Vishnu Himself. All honours are given including the ceremonial washing of the feet of the groom by the father-in-law and offer of madhu parka (a mixture of yogurt, honey and ghee) to the accompaniment of selected Veda mantras.



To prove that he is worthy, the groom must promise the bride's father that he will walk with her in a good path (Dharma), that he will provide adequate wealth (Artha) and he truly loves her (kama). These three promises are regarded as great achievements in the Hindu world.

Step 3: Kanyaa Daanam (Entrusting of the Daughter)

The bride's parents perform rituals of the giving away of their daughter. Bride's father places her dyed hand in the groom's who holds it as a symbol of their everlasting love.

By pouring out some of the sacred water, the bride's father "washes his hands" of her and gives her away at which point the groom recites Vedic hymns to Kama, the God of Love, asking for the blessing of pure love.

Step 4: Vara Prekshanam

In this ritual, the bridegroom and the bride look at each other formally for the first time. The bridegroom worries about any dosas (defects) that the bride might have and prays to the gods Varuna, Brihaspati, Indra and Surya to remove every defect and to make her fit for harmonious and long marriage life blessed with progeny and happiness. The bride groom recites the mantra and wipes the eyebrows of the bride with a blade of darbha grass, as if he is chasing away all defects. The darbha grass is thrown behind the bride at the conclusion of this ceremony.

Step 5: Vara Mala (Garlanding each other)

In this ritual both bride and groom garland each other. The first garlanding is done by the bride, followed by groom. This is considered as a main ritual following the tradition of Swyamvar of Sita and Lord Ram.

Step 6: Maangalya Dhaaranam

There is no Veda Mantra for tying the mangala sutram (auspicious thread) around the neck of the bride by the groom. The latter takes the mangala sutram in his hands and recites the following verse:

*Mangalyam tantunAnena mama jIvanA hethunA |
kaNThe: badhnami subhage! sanjIva Sarada: Satam ||*

(Meaning: This is a sacred thread. This is essential for my long life. I tie this around your neck, O maiden having many auspicious attributes! May you live happily for a hundred years (with me).

Step 7: Paani Grahanam (also known as Hast Milap)

After maangalya dhaaranam, the groom lowers his right palm and encloses it over the right hand of the bride. He covers all the five fingers of the right hand of the bride with his right palm through this act of paani grahanam. He recites mantras in praise of Bhaga, Aryama, Savita, Indra, Agni, Suryan, Vayu and Saraswati, while holding the bride's hand. He prays for long life, progeny, prosperity and harmony with the bride during their married life. The closed fingers of the right hand of the bride is said to represent her heart. The paani grahanam ritual symbolizes the bride surrendering her heart in the hands of the groom during the occasion of the marriage.

Step 8: Pradhaana Homam

After sapta padi, the couple take their seat on the western side of the sacred fire and conduct pradhaana homam. During the conducting of this homam, the bride must place her right hand on her husband's body so that she gets the full benefit of the homam through symbolic participation.

Step 9: Sapta Padi

During this ritual, the groom walks with the bride to the right side of the sacred fire. All along, he holds his wife's right hand in his right hand in the way in which he held her hand during the paani grahanam ceremony. He stops, bends down and touches the right toe of his wife with his right hand and helps her take seven steps around the fire. At the beginning of each step, he

recites a Veda mantra to invoke the blessings of Maha Vishnu. Through these seven mantras, he asks Maha Vishnu to follow in the footsteps of his wife and bless her with food, strength, piety, progeny, wealth, comfort and health. At the conclusion of the seven steps, he addresses his wife with a moving statement from the Vedas summarized below:

Dear Wife! By taking these seven steps, you have become my dearest friend. I pledge my unflinching loyalty to you. Let us stay together for the rest of our lives. Let us not separate from each other ever. Let us be of one mind in carrying out our responsibilities as householders (grihasthas). Let us love and cherish each other and enjoy nourishing food and good health. Let us discharge our prescribed Vedic duties to our elders, ancestors, rishis, creatures, and gods. Let our aspirations be united. I will be the Saaman and may you be the Rk (Saaman here refers to the music and Rk refers to the Vedic text that is being cast into music). Let me be the upper world and let you be the Bhumi or Mother Earth. I will be the Sukla or life force and may you be the bearer of that Sukla. Let me be the mind and let you be the speech. May you follow me to conceive children and gain worldly as well as spiritual wealth. May all auspiciousness come your way.

This is a very important vow where bride and groom promise each other that they will not forsake each other in this world or the worlds above.

The Seven Marriage Vows

The couple takes seven vows which are read out to the congregation by the priest:

- ✦ They vow to remain together for the rest of their lives
- ✦ The promise to embrace each other's families as their own
- ✦ They vow to remain faithful to one another
- ✦ They promise to support each other in times of trouble and rejoice together in times of happiness
- ✦ They promise to share each other body and soul
- ✦ They acknowledge God's presence as a witness to their marriage
- ✦ They vow to share religious duties, financial wealth and family duties.

This followed by a prayer to make their union a permanent one.

Step 10: Stepping on the grinding stone

After pradhaana homam, the husband holds the right toe of his wife and gently lifts her foot and places it on a flat granite grinding stone known asma in Sanskrit. The stone stands at the right side of the sacred fire. The husband recites a Veda mantra when he places the right foot of his wife on the stone:

May you stand on this firm stone. May you be rock-firm during your stay on this grinding stone. May you stand up to those who oppose you while you carry out your time-honored responsibilities as a wife sanctioned by the Vedas and tradition. May you develop tolerance to your enemies and put up a fair fight to defend your legitimate rights as the head of the household in a firm manner, equal to the steady strength of this grinding stone.

Note: This is a promise made by the wife to the husband that she will stand firm in his life and provide full support in all his household duties as long as he stands firm on his promises. As a symbol of this the Husband offers a silver ring called “Mette” to the wife. Married women wear this on the finger next to the large toe of the foot.

Step 11: Laaja Homam

After ammi stepping, a ceremony of doing homam with parched rice is conducted. Here, the wife cups her hands and the brothers of the bride fill the cupped hands with parched rice. The husband adds a drop of ghee to the parched rice and recites five Veda mantras. At the end of each of the recitation, the parched rice is thrown into the sacred fire as havis (offering) to Agni. Through these mantras, the wife prays for long life for her husband and for a marriage filled with peace and harmony. At the end of the laaja homam, the husband unties the darbha belt around the waist of his wife with another mantra. The husband states through this mantra that he unites his wife and ties her now with the bonds of Varuna and invites her to be a full partner in his life to enjoy the blessings of wedded life.

Step 12: Praavisya Homam

A fire ritual known as praavisya homam is performed by the couple to the accompaniment of thirteen Veda mantras from the Rg Veda. Jayaadi homam is also part of the praavisya homam. This homam offers the salutation of the newly married couple to Agni Deva and asks for strength and nourishment to discharge the duties of a grihasthas for the next one hundred years. After that, the bride shifts her position from the right side of her husband to his left side. At that time, once again, she recites a Veda mantra invoking the gods for blessings of children and wealth to perform the duties of a householder.

At the end of the above homam, a child is placed on the lap of the bride and she offers a fruit to the child, while reciting a prescribed Veda mantra. Yet another mantram asks the assembled guests to bless the bride and then retire to their own individual homes peacefully.

The rich and meaningful ceremony of the Hindu marriage (Kalyana Mahotsavam of the temples) is thus carried out in concert with sacred Veda Mantras. The bride and bridegroom should enunciate clearly the Veda mantras and reflect on their meanings during the different stages of the marriage ceremony. This way, they can be sure of a long, happy and prosperous married life and play their appropriate role in society to the fullest extent. Srinivasa Kalyanam is performed in the temples to remind us of these hoary Vedic traditions behind a Hindu marriage.



JAIN WEDDINGS



Jain literature describes many rituals, which are essentially social in nature; the ceremony for marriage is one of them. The Jain Wedding Ritual has the influence of the predominant Hindu community in India, has regional variations, and these variations have travelled with the Jains overseas.

A. Choosing a Partner

In Indian culture, marriage is a community event as not only two individuals, but two families are united. Until, and sometimes after marriage, children generally live with their parents, and it is the parents' responsibility to introduce them (perhaps with the help of suitable intermediaries) to prospective marriage partners. It is quite misleading to refer to this as 'arranged marriage' — in practice, the couple has every opportunity over a long period to get to know each other, and the decision to marry belongs to them alone.

B. Engagement ceremony

When it is agreed that a couple are suited, an engagement ceremony is held, to which prominent members of the community are invited, there is a ritual exchange of symbolic items and gifts and the engagement is recorded in an engagement document. This ceremony takes place in the home of the groom or in a community hall, and the date of the marriage is usually discussed at this stage.

C. Pre-marriage ceremony

When the date of the wedding is agreed, after astrological consultations regarding the auspicious day and time, invitations are sent out or made in person. The number of guests invited can be very large: many relatives and many members of the community have to be included. About seven to ten days before the wedding day, the bride's family sends a delegation of close relatives to the home of the groom bearing a special invitation, written by a priest, requesting the groom's family to bring the wedding party to the marriage ceremony. The two families prepare dresses and jewellery for the bride, which she will take to her new home. The groom's family presents their gifts ritually a day or two before the ceremony, and the bride's



family's gifts are presented on the wedding day. There is no dowry system in the Jain community, gifts from the bride's to the groom's family are also prescribed by the community, but in most cases the bride or the bridegroom accept gifts in cash or kind, and the parents accept theirs in cash (*chanlo*) which traditionally was considered a help towards the wedding expenses.

D. The Jain Marriage Ceremony

The Jain marriage ceremony described below is based on the 'Text of Daily Duties' (*Acaara Dinkar Grantha*) compiled by Vardhamana Suri in 1411 CE, as the correct Jain rituals were lost for many centuries, and Jains appropriated a modified form of the Hindu marriage ceremony and still, in many cases, Jain weddings follow Hindu custom, but the principle of *ahimsaa* is not compromised by any aspect of the ceremony. As the prayers and mantras of a Jain ceremony are believed to guide the couple towards happiness, prosperity, longevity and spiritual advancement, there has been a revival of the Jain wedding ceremony. The marriage rituals are performed in Sanskrit and Ardha Magadhi and their translation is available in Gujarati.

The marriage ceremony is conducted by a Brahmin or by any well-respected Jain. There are sixteen stages in the marriage rituals. The first three of which take place before the wedding day.

Maatruka sthaapan, the auspicious ritual at the bride's home, is an invocation of the heavenly goddesses: *Brahmani*, *Maheshvari*, *Kaumari*, *Vaisnavi*, *Varahi*, *Indrani*, *Chamunda* and *Tripura*, to take up temporary abode in the bride's home to ensure the happiness and fertility of the couple, and takes place between two and seven days before the wedding day.

Kulakara sthaapan, the auspicious ritual at the groom's home, is an invocation of the heavenly gods: *Vimalvahan*, *Chakhsusman*, *Yashasvan*, *Abhichandra*, *Prasanjit*, *Marudev* and *Nabhi*, to take up temporary residence in the bridegroom's home to ensure the happiness, fertility and maintenance of the family tradition.

Following these ceremonies, the skin of both bride and groom will be regularly massaged with beautifying substances

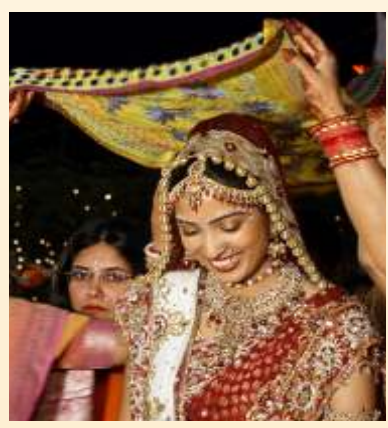


such as perfumed oil, and turmeric. Pujaas (worship) will be performed in the temple for their well being and maalaaropana (the ritual placing of gold chains by each family around the neck of the son or the daughter) takes place. This immediate pre-marriage period is one of rejoicing and celebration for the families.

After the day of the wedding, ideally seven days after it, but earlier if this is not possible, a further ceremony bids farewell to the deities who took up residence in the homes of the families.

Mandapa pratisthaa, the auspicious ritual at the home or wedding hall, invokes the gods of all locations to establish the sacred place (*mandapa*) within which the wedding will take place. This ceremony of the 'sacred point' (*maneka stambha*) takes place either on the day of the wedding or a few days before, at the bride's home; the *maneka stambha* is a simple wooden symbol, which evokes the blessings of the deities from all four points of the compass. Sometimes the ceremony does take place at the bridegroom's home. The *maneka stambha* is placed in the *mandapa*, a sacred place within the *chori*, an area made by creating four corner pillars with arches of leaves (*toranas*). The marriage ceremony takes place inside the *chori*. A small low platform (*vedi*) in the centre bears the sacred flame.

Marriage procession. Bathed, dressed in his best clothes and jewellery, with a *tilak* on his forehead, the bridegroom worships the divinities and, with his relatives, begins the journey to the marriage venue. Traditionally, he would ride on a horse or elephant accompanied by musicians and singers, but nowadays, the ceremony is performed in a hall or hotel and the groom's party may travel by car. They walk ceremonially the last 100 yards or so towards the door of the hall, where the priest, who is to perform the ceremony, recites a mantra, praising Lord Adinatha, the first *Tirthankara*, emphasising the glory of the Jain path of purification, and praying for peace, contentment, health, happiness, friendship and prosperity for the couple. The bride's sister or an unmarried female relative circles ritually three times around the groom in a clockwise direction; this ritual is believed to ward off evil. The groom arrives at the entrance of the hall where he stands on a small stool and the bride's mother, with other female relatives, welcome him with symbolic gestures or the



waving of a lamp (*aarati*) and places a red cloth or garland around his shoulder, but it is a custom nowadays for the bride to welcome the groom first with a garland.

The groom enters the hall, stepping on — and breaking — two earthenware bowls placed in his path; this ritual guards the ceremony against any evil influence. He is then led into the *chori* and the groom sits on the left of the two seats. His bride, elaborately dressed and ornamented, is escorted by her maternal uncles and takes her seat facing the groom, sometimes screened from him by a small curtain.

Mangalaastaka, Auspicious prayers, are recited to Lord Mahavira and his parents, Gautama, Sthulbhadra, Lord Adinatha and his parents, and Pundarik, Bharata and other cakravartis, all the Vasudevas and Prativasudevas. Prayers are also recited to Brahmi and Candanbala, guardian deities Cakreshwari and Sidhayika, and Karpadi and Matanga for protection. After a series of prayers, the priest places a cloth garland around the couple's necks, and then the bride's parents symbolically wash the groom's feet.

Hasta melapa. The priest puts the palm of the bride's hand on the groom's palm symbolising the beginning of a lasting relationship of unity between the couple. As this ritual is the most important, it must take place at the precise time deemed most auspicious. The priest recites prayers hoping that the bride and groom may become partners with a similar spiritual aptitude, enjoy the same things and have a lasting union by way of the joining of hands.



Torana pratisthaa, *Vedi pratisthaa* and *Agni sthaapan* *Torana pratisthaa* is an invocation to the goddess Laxmi to bless the couple. *Vedi pratisthaa* an invocation to the gods of the earth to protect the couple, and the ritual of placing the sacred fire (*agni sthaapan*) in a small basin (*kunda*) is accompanied by an invocation to the fire gods to bless the couple. The priest recites a series of *mantras* and prayers for happiness, honour, children, welfare and prosperity, and he makes offerings to Laxmi and the gods of the earth and of fire.

Houm is a mantra accompanying a series of offerings of food and drink, sacrifice and material wealth, placed in the sacred fire, to the *protectors* of the eight directions: Yama, Nairuta, Varuna, Vayu, Kubera, Ishana, Naga, and Brahmaanan; the nine *planets*: the sun, moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Rahu and Ketu; all the '*sur*' gods (muses); the *bhavanapati* gods, such as Asura, Naga, Supama, Vidyuta, Ocean, direction, wind, and Stanitkumars; to *vyantars*

such as Pisaca, Bhuta, Yaksha, Raksasa, Kinnara, Kimpurusa, Mahoraga and Gaandharva; the *star* gods such as the moon, the sun, planets, constellations and all the stars; the *vaimanika* gods such as Saudharma, Isana, Sanatkumar, Mahendra, Brahma, Lanata, Shukra, Sahastrar, Anata, Pranata, Aruna, Achyut, Graiveyak and Anuttara; the *caturnikaaya-devas*, recognised by their consort or weapon or vehicle or their special strength, Indra, Samanika, Parsada, all the Lokpaalas, Anika, Prakirna; *lokaantika* and the *abhiyogika* gods; all *angels* (*dik-kumaris*) on the island of Rucaka; and all seas, rivers, mountains, caves and forest-gods.

The priest puts an offering into the sacred fire after each *mantra* of *ghee*, betelnut, grains of *jav* (a cereal) and *tal* (an oil seed) and each begins with the words *aum arham* and ends with *swaahaa*.

The priest performs the first *abhiseka* by anointing the couple's heads with holy water (*nhaavana*) brought from the temple, then gotraacaar by reciting *mantras* and the genealogies of both families, and then announces the declaration of the marriage. He then blesses the couple and presents them with rice, flowers, incense and sweets, which they offer in *pujaa* to the sacred fire.

In the key *chaar pheraa* ceremony, the couple circles the sacred fire four times in a clockwise direction; the bride leading the first three rounds. The bride's brother presents rice grains to the bride and groom who, in turn, after each round, offer them to the priest, who makes offerings to the sacred fire, after reciting the *mantras* for each circuit.

In the *mantras*, various components of karmic matter attached to the soul, and their effects, are recited. The couple is reminded that the physical relations, which are the result of deluding *karma*, may be enjoyed, but one should strive towards the ultimate goal of spiritual liberation (*moksa*).

In the part of the ceremony known as *kanyaa daan*, the priest offers grains of *jav*, *tal*, a small blade of grass and a drop of water to the bride's father or guardian and recites a *mantra*, which the bride's father repeats, handing over his beloved daughter. The groom accepts the bride by reciting a *mantra*. At this point the priest recites the seven vows: to share their married life with dignity; to respect and love their families; to respect both family homes; to foster love, equality and trust; to behave so as to maintain the respect of their families; to follow the ethical path in work, pleasure and spiritual advancement; and to be mutually supportive and supportive of society and the world, and the couple agrees to each of the vows. After the vows the couple is invited to make their fourth round around the sacred fire, and led by the groom the couple offers grains to the fire. This *seals* the marriage bond.

The priest sprinkles a little holy powder on the heads of the bride and groom (*vaasksepa*). Then the bride's father offers water and tal to the groom, who passes them to the priest who, sprinkles them on the bride.

With the second *abhiseka*, the priest blesses the couple saying: 'You two have been married. Now you are equal in love, experience, happiness and good conduct. You are true friends in happiness and misery, in virtues and faults. May you become equal in mind, speech and action, and in all the good virtues.'

With the unclasping of hands (*kar-mocan*), the priest recites *mantras* and says: 'You have released your hands but your love is unbroken.' The bride's father gives a symbolic gift to the groom. The community then pronounces *blessings* of congratulation on the couple and the invoked or invited gods are reverently requested to return to their abodes.

After this, the couple is given a send-off by their relatives, and return to the bridegroom's home, visiting the temple on the way. It is the customary to hold a reception and dinner for the guests before the bride and groom depart, when individual congratulations are offered to the couple.

For Jains, marriage had no religious sanctity, but was a civil contract, although marriage was regarded as desirable and necessary for some religious duties and rituals; women looked after domestic affairs and children, while the man's role was to earn and perform duties outside the home. In discussing the necessity and importance of marriage, the *Aadipurana* mentions that offspring are not possible without marriage and religion is not possible without offspring.

Jain marriage is usually within the community members with similar backgrounds, where the couple has free choice to agree to the proposal. The community not only witnesses the union but also helps in overcoming future misunderstanding. Inter-caste marriages within different Jain communities or other religious communities are not penalised, sometimes they are accepted and blessed by the community leaders. Widows usually do not re-marry; they keep themselves busy in spiritual activities, but there is no prohibition for their re-marriage

In Jain society the marriage is usually permanent, but it can be nullified by *mahaajana*, if either of the couple finds a major defect in the partner within a prescribed time these include; unchastity; impotence; intolerable behaviour; if the spouse absconds or is missing; or becomes an ascetic or dies. Though they are permitted, most divorcee women or widows do not remarry; they involve themselves in religious and spiritual life, but many men remarry. The divorce in Jain society is very rare. Pre-marital relationships bring discredit to families and are discouraged.

JEWISH WEDDINGS



The Hebrew term for marriage is Kiddushin, 'sanctification'. Quite apart from any other function that marriage may fulfil, in Jewish teaching marriage is seen as a holy union.

Stability

Until recent times Jewish family life was regarded as being one of the most stable in western society. This was due in large part to the clearly defined set of moral values and obligations which are the foundation of Jewish marriage. The emphasis was always on responsibilities rather than on rights. In recent years, consistent with declining standards of religious observance, the stability of Jewish marriages has also declined, though not to the level of the general population.

Celibacy

Celibacy is not a Jewish ideal; on the contrary, it is regarded as an inferior state. In words of the Zohar* 'a bachelor is only half a man.' In ancient Israel only married men could normally be appointed to important religious offices (such as the High Priesthood).

Selected quotes:

Bible

- * *Be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28)*
- * *A man shall leave his mother and father and cleave to his wife (Genesis 2:24)*
- * *He who finds a wife finds good (Proverbs 18:22)*

Talmud

- * *He who dwells without a wife is bereft of joy*
- * *A husband should regard his wife as a princess. A wife should regard her husband as king*
- * *A man must love his wife as himself and honour her more than himself.*

Mediaeval thinkers

- * *The mating of animals is a temporary and purely physical*



act. Through the sanctification of marriage, however, a husband and wife become the closest of relatives. (Maimonides)

Mystical tradition

- * *Husband and wife are two halves of the same soul. Adam and Eve were originally two halves of the same body.*

Partner Selection

Jewish law insists that Jew should only marry a Jewish partner.

In the past the 'arranged marriage' was the norm, though not in the sense of the young couple not having any say in the matter. Judaism has always discouraged casual relationships, trial marriages or living together, and men and women of marriageable age did not have regular opportunities to meet.

In practice, marriages were only arranged in so far that parents, relations or friends would suggest partners for a young man or woman, and enquire into their backgrounds. If a proposal seemed suitable a couple would meet, and it was entirely up to them to decide whether they wished to meet again. Usually, after two or three meetings they would have been able to decide whether to become engaged.

Nowadays 'arranged' marriages of this type are still the norm amongst some Orthodox Jews. However, in other Jewish circles, boy meets girl in as varied circumstances as in society generally.

A. Preparation for Marriage

Jewish education is not just academic learning but a preparation for living life to the full as a member of the Jewish people. A child's earliest influences come from the home. There he or she observes the parental relationship, and absorbs the warmth of Jewish family life as well as a great deal of knowledge about day to day Jewish living. In such an environment a child develops the resolve to emulate his or her parents in building a new Jewish home.

Detailed knowledge of the laws, customs and usages entailed in marriage are learned formally.

B. Engagement

The engagement ceremony might be a formal promise to marry, called 'tenaim', or an informal 'at home', where family and friends express their good wishes. In some communities the formal betrothal ceremony is delayed until just before the wedding. Nowadays, rather than

'tenaim' which are very formal and dissolution of them would be difficult, the custom is for the two mothers to break a plate as a sign of agreement for the wedding to take place. The ceremony is called the 'wpwt'(word) and is accompanied by celebrations.

C. The wedding date

Not long after their engagement, a couple will fix a date for their wedding which could be a long time ahead. This should take into account the bride's monthly cycle, for Judaism forbids martial relations during menstruation and for seven days afterwards. This period of abstinence ends when the wife immerses herself in a mikveh, a ritual bath. A bride too, must make her first visit to the mikveh just prior to her wedding. Ideally, both bride and groom will have spent a couple of months learning and reviewing the laws of family purity; a code of conduct that will regulate the physical side of their life together.



D. The Wedding Ceremony

The wedding ceremony comprises:-

- (a) a religious ceremony
- (b) a wedding feast
- (c) a week of celebration – the 'seven blessings'

(a) The religious ceremony

This usually takes place either in or outside a synagogue or in the place where the wedding celebrations are held.

Fasting

Both bride and groom fast (on days permitted to fast) until after the religious ceremony for this is their own personal 'Day of Atonement', when they pray for forgiveness for all past sins. Married life must begin with a 'clean slate'.



'Bedeken' – Placing the Veil

The bride arrives at the synagogue and enters the bridal room. Her veil is raised over her head. The groom, led by his father and father-in-law and accompanied by an entourage, some holding candles, is brought into the room. He approaches his bride and covers her face with the veil.

This custom originated because Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah, instead of his beloved Rachel (Genesis 29:18-25). The subterfuge was possible because Jacob had not checked her identity prior to the wedding.

Chuppah – The canopy

Prior to the commencement, two men are appointed to act as witnesses to the ceremony.

The groom is led under the chuppah (canopy) carried on four poles by his father and father-in-law. There, together with the rabbi and cantor, they await the bride. She is led by her mother and mother-in-law (sometimes bearing candles), and takes her place by her groom. In some communities the bride walks round the groom seven times.

The cantor, sometimes accompanied by a choir, chants a song of welcome. The rabbi takes a silver wine-cup filled to the brim and begins the 'birkat eirusin', the blessing of betrothal. As he concludes the blessings the wine cup is passed to the groom and bride, who sip it in turn.

The groom now places a ring on his bride's right forefinger and says (in Hebrew) 'You are sanctified to me with this ring according to the law of Moses and Israel'. The bride makes no verbal response, but simply accepts the ring.

The 'ketuba', marriage document is then read. This is a formal contract which (a) sets out the duties of the husband to feed, clothe and provide a home for his wife, and (b) states his financial obligations to provide for his wife should he predecease or divorce her.

It is usual at some point for the rabbi to offer a few words of inspiration and advice to the young couple.

The ceremony ends with the 'birkat nisuin', seven blessings praising God for having created humankind, and for having endowed people with the ability to procreate. The blessings also mention the future messianic hope.

Finally, to recall that the Jewish people are still bereft of the Holy Temple of Jerusalem, the groom breaks a glass (suitably wrapped for safety) under his heel. This triggers cries of 'mazel tov' (good luck) from relatives and friends and, amidst tears of joy, kisses and handshakes, the ceremony is over.

Yichud – private togetherness

Bride and groom are then led to a room where they are left alone for a short time. There they break their fast. This private togetherness actually completes the marriage ceremony. (According to Talmudic practice, in ancient times marriage could be affirmed in one of three ways: money, document or sexual relations; these are symbolised nowadays by the ring, ketubah, and yichud)

(b) The Seudah – Wedding feast

There are many variations of this. The number of quests, speeches, courses, size of band, location of hall, menu and style of celebration will depend on family or national custom, inclination, family size, finances and social stratum. The common factors are a joyous atmosphere, singing and dancing and the repeat of the same seven blessings that were recited under the chuppah.

(c) The week of celebration – the seven blessings

In many circles the newly-weds will have arranged to fly off on a honeymoon to some secret destination. However, those that do so miss out on a beautiful, if tiring experience – a week of feasting, each night in the home of some relative or friend. Each feast is a mini-wedding with guests invited by the host. It is an opportunity for a couple to become acquainted with each other's relatives and friends. Each feast concludes with the seven blessings that were first recited under the chuppah.

Sexual ethics – Family purity

Judaism recognises that people have sexual needs, and sees marriage as the framework within which these may be fulfilled. Judaism strictly forbids sexual relations outside of marriage. However, in Jewish law the physical side of marriage is regulated by the principles of family purity.

During menstruation, and for seven days afterwards, a woman is in a state of 'niddah', separateness. Throughout this span of time a couple are not permitted to have any form of physical contact with one another.

The wife leaves her niddah state only by immersing herself totally in a mikveh (ritual pool). On emerging, she and her husband may now resume the physical side of their marriage.

The niddah laws, in effect, rule out sexual relations for over 40% of the time. Instead of putting a strain on the marriage, however, those couples of who observe family purity find that it

enhances their relationship in several ways:

- (a) Absence (or abstinence) makes the heart grow fonder'. The Talmud describes a wife returning from the mikveh as a new bride under the chuppah (wedding canopy). Indeed, many couples find that it brings feeling of freshness to their marriage, and prevents them from becoming bored with one another.
- (b) Couples adhering to these laws do not get blasé about sex or each other. It is no coincidence that marital infidelity and divorce rates are extremely low amongst religious couples who keep family purity.
- (c) The niddah interlude is a time when husband and wife can strengthen their relationship in non-physical ways. Where family purity is observed, a wife is seen as a person not a sexual object.
- (d) Above all, the family purity laws emphasise that the Creator is not limited to synagogues and temples – but that people have to accept His involvement and actively seek it in every aspect of their lives, even in the bedroom.

During the first two thirds of the last century observance of family purity has declined throughout most of Anglo-Jewry. Today it is increasing, as more and more people are returning to their Jewish roots, and young couples are re0discovering the meaningfulness of this very private area of their Jewish lives.

Intermarriage (out-marriage)

The Torah forbids marriage between Jew and no-Jew (intermarriage). The reason is explicitly stated in the Bible; the children of a mixed marriage will almost certainly retain little or no loyalty to the ideas of Judaism (cf. Deuteronomy 7:3, Ezra 9:1 – 10:44).

Intermarriage

From the Jewish perspective, intermarriage violates a Biblical commandment, threatens the future viability of the Jewish people, can confuse the children by generating an identity crisis (which religion shall I follow?), often puts the marriage a risk, and can cause misery in later generations.

MUSLIM WEDDINGS



It is quite normal in Islam for relatives outside the immediate family to marry, and thought preferable that the new husband or wife is someone whose character and background is well known and understood.

Muslims are urged to choose their partners very carefully, and remain loyal to them for the rest of their lives, for it is hoped in due course that the wife will become a mother and the husband a father.

A. Arranged marriages

For this reason, Muslim marriages are often arranged for young couples by their parents. In the West, most young people think it is natural to fall in love, get engaged, and then married. Muslims sometimes regard 'being under the influence of love' as a dangerous and intoxicating state of mind that could easily cloud the judgement.

Parents will always seek to find good, compatible partners for their children, and they may not approve of an unwise romance.

However, marriages should always be with the consent of both partners, and they have the right to disagree with the parent's choice. A forced marriage is usually doomed to failure.

B. The wedding

The actual ceremony is a very simple affair, and the bride does not even have to go, as long as she sends two witnesses of her agreement.

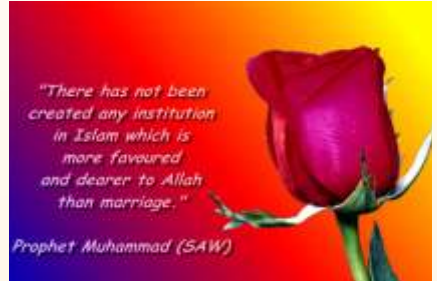
If the wedding is to take place at a mosque she may wear a white wedding dress. If she is from Pakistan she will put on scarlet shalwar trousers and tunic, and all the gold jewellery she owns. She may paint a pattern in red henna on the palms of her hands and the soles of her feet.

The wedding takes only a few moments, and consists of reading from the Qur'an, the exchange of vows in front of witnesses, and prayers. No special religious official is necessary – any two adult male witnesses will do; but often the Imam (teacher) is present for the happy occasion.

C. Walima

The walima is a party given for all friends and family. It usually consists of a sumptuous meal and lots of presents are given, sometimes money. It takes place within three days of the wedding.

As this is a religious occasion, the women celebrate separately from the men. It is considered very wrong for an invited person not to attend.



D. Money matters

Muslim women have the right to be paid for being a housewife, and for breastfeeding their own children. A woman's salary, if she goes out to work is regarded as her own and not her husband's. Any property she may own before marriage remains hers, and she does not have to give it to her husband unless she wishes.

Even if he is poor, the husband is expected to provide for her. A woman does not have to take her husband's name, but keep her own.

E. Mixed marriages

Muslims boys may marry Christians and Jews, but Muslim girls are not permitted to marry non-Muslims because in Islam the children have to take the religion of the father, and so would become non-Muslims. If a youth wishes to marry a Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist girl, it is only permitted if she converts to Islam.

'A woman is sought in marriage on account of four things: her property, her family, her beauty, her piety. Seek to win one for the sake of her piety.'
(Hadith)

'Do not marry only for the sake of beauty; the beauty may become the cause of moral decline. Do not marry for the sake of wealth, for this may become the cause of disobedience. Marry rather on the grounds of religious devotion.'
(Hadith)

The best of treasures is a good wife. She is pleasing to her husband's eyes, obedient to his word, and watchful over his possessions in his absence; and the best of you are those who treat their wives best.'
(Hadith)

F. Polygamy

Sometimes a man may marry more than one woman. The Prophet Muhammad had thirteen wives after the death of his first wife Khadijah; other Muslim men are allowed four wives, but only on certain conditions:

- ✦ The first wife should give permission
- ✦ Later wives must not be a cause of distress
- ✦ All wives must be treated equally, (equal homes, gifts, and nights spent with each in turn) unless permission is given by the wife involved
- ✦ Making love equally is not required (or possible!), but sharing time equally is.

Some elderly wives are quite pleased for the husband to take on a younger wife, especially if she is a good worker and may have modern training, for example as a nurse.

Sometimes the reasons for polygamy are based on the needs of the community, particularly if there is a surplus of women as, for example, after a war. It is considered unkind for women to be condemned to spinsterhood without the chance to become cherished mothers in a household.

The idea of unmarried mother appals Muslims, neither do they think much of aging wives being cast out the moment a man allows himself to fall for a younger woman. The spirit of Islam is to protect the weak and vulnerable, and not leave women to fend for themselves if they do not wish to do so.

Polygamy may also be allowed if a wife is barren and the husband wants children, or if the wife is unable to cope with the household through chronic sickness.

SIKH WEDDINGS



The Sikh marriage ceremony is called 'Anand Karaj' which means the ceremony of bliss. It is an important rite of passage for a Sikh. It is not just the joining in matrimony of a man and a woman but a deep spiritual union between the two and a path in achieving the goal of oneness with the Divine. In the Sikh Scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, this union is described as;

'Those are not husband and wife who stay together, those are who have one light in two bodies.'

A. Choosing a partner

There is much cultural similarity amongst people of Indian origin, when it comes to the parental responsibility of choosing partners for their young people. In the Sikh tradition, finding a suitable match for their sons and daughters of marriageable age, especially after they have completed their education, becomes an important activity for the families.



In contemporary Sikh society, the choice is made together by the intending partners and the parents on both sides and the young people have the opportunity to meet each other before a decision is made to go ahead. If both sides are satisfied then the father of the girl or another male member will offer a small sum of money to the prospective son-in-law as a way of approval of the relationship being formalised. This is more of a cultural norm rather than a religious practice. The practice has become more of an assisted marriage rather than an arranged marriage.

However, a small percentage of young people are making their own choices, in many cases outside of the Sikh faith, which can cause difficulties for the family, sometimes a complete breakdown but eventually some families make adjustments after a period of time in order to maintain contact.

B. The Engagement Ceremony (Mangni/ Kurmai)

The engagement ceremony is not essential according to the Sikh Code of Conduct. However, if the families so desire, a ceremony may be held. In India, it is usually in a Gurdwara near the groom's home. In most marriages taking place in the U.K. it precedes the marriage ceremony in the Gurdwara. A party of five or seven relatives of the girl, usually the grandfather (if alive), the father, father's and mother's brothers and the bride's brothers perform the engagement ceremony in the presence of the holy scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib. They present a kara (a bracelet which should be steel but is usually gold), Indian sweets, dry and fresh fruit to the young man. During the ceremony, prayers are said and a special hymn from the scripture is

sung. The girl's father puts on the kara on the groom's right hand and puts a dried date in his mouth as a mark of his acceptance as his daughter's fiancée. The boy's family reciprocate by presenting gifts of clothes, sweets and jewellery in a ceremony called 'Chunni Ceremony,' to the girl at a different place, usually her family home.

Over the years, a ring ceremony has also been introduced as part of the engagement ceremony in India where the couple to be married exchange rings at a special event organised by the families especially in India.

C. Pre-marriage rituals

These have no religious significance but it is a cultural practice observed by most families.

Generally, the evening before the marriage ceremony starts with the women's sangeet (music), in which there is joyful singing and humorous teasing by female relatives of the groom and bride in their respective places. The relatives bring gifts for the wedding which are displayed along with the gifts which the bride's or groom's family have chosen for each other's families and relatives. Feasting begins on a large scale. A few days before the wedding, some families also do a ceremonial preparation of sweets and savouries as part of the pre-wedding.

The Mayian ceremony is performed on the girl and the boy in their respective homes the evening before the wedding. The boy or girl is made to sit on a low wooden seat under a temporary canopy of a traditional red fabric material, held up by four married female relatives. A paste made up of gram flour, turmeric and oil is ritually rubbed on the face, arms, legs and feet to help with deep cleansing and beautifying the individual for the wedding day whilst traditional songs are sung. From then onwards, it is expected of the boy and the girl to stay at home till they proceed for the ceremony.

Afterwards, in the girl's case, her maternal uncle ceremonially puts on her wrists Choori, red ivory type bangles and makes presents of clothes and jewellery to her and other members of his sister's family. The girl's mother's family have a distinctive role in all the ceremonies.

D. Preparation for the wedding

It may take up to a year to plan a wedding. Some families have started the practice of engaging the wedding planner to do the job for them. As Sikh marriage ceremonies are expected to take place in a Sikh gurdwara and most families choose to have it over the weekend, most gurdwaras have a long waiting list (our local gurdwara has an eighteen months waiting list). August is the most popular month because of bank and other holidays in the UK.

The invitation cards are sent by post to relatives and friends or home delivered by the parents of the bride and groom to their closest relatives usually within the month of the wedding.

E. Civil Marriage

As many gurdwaras have been licensed for civil marriages, such marriages are also taking place there, either before or after the religious ceremony. It makes it so much easier for the couples and their families. Some couples choose to have a separate civil registration either at their local registry office or at unusual places which are now licensed to hold such ceremonies. This usually takes place before the religious ceremony.



F. Wedding Rituals

On the religious wedding day, the bridegroom dresses appropriately for the occasion. In addition he wears a scarf round his neck and carries a ceremonial sword. He travels with the wedding party (barat) of his relatives and friends to the Sikh gurdwara, where the ceremony is to be held.

On arrival, the party is greeted by the bride's relatives, singing Sikh sacred hymns and the greeting of Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguruji ki Fateh.



This is followed by the 'Milni' ceremony in which the individual relatives formally meet and greet each other, such as the bride's father garlanding the groom's father and making a gift of a turban and the groom's father responding with putting a garland round the bride's father's neck. All the key relatives share such greetings.

Then the wedding party is welcomed to some refreshments consisting of Indian sweets and savouries and soft drinks, fruit juices and tea which are also shared by the bride's party.

Afterwards both the parties move to the prayer hall as members of the congregation in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book. They listen to the Raagis, the religious musicians, singing hymns as they enter and seat themselves on the carpet, men on one side and the women on the other side in the hall.

Before the Anand Karaj wedding ceremony begins, the bride and the groom pay their respects by bowing in front of the scripture and presenting the gifts of Romallas (the special coverings

for the Guru Granth Sahib) and donations. They are then seated, the bridegroom sits first and then the bride joins and sits on the left of the groom, in front of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, which is the central focus of any Sikh place of worship and for ceremonies.



The ceremony begins with the Ardas prayer said by the officiant to invoke God's blessing for the couple, while both sets of parents and the bride and the groom stand and the rest of the congregation stay seated. Then the holy book is opened at random and a hymn from there is recited as the command from the Guru for the occasion.

The officiant then addresses the couple about their mutual obligations as husband and wife according to the Sikh tenets, especially the notion of the state of 'one light in two bodies.' Based on that principle a married couple should not find it too difficult in achieving true and lasting love through a deep spiritual union.

Then the father of the bride places an end of the groom's scarf in his daughter's hand, a symbol of giving her away, while a hymn is sung which denotes the bride saying to the groom 'I am from now on attached to you.' This symbolic gesture also has a deeper meaning of the human soul seeking the union with the divine.

After this the Lavan, the four marriage verses are recited, one by one, followed by the couple circumambulating around Guru Granth Sahib, while the raagis sing the same verse, till all the four verses are recited and sung.

These four verses represent the four stages of love. The first describes the preparation and longing for the state of marriage, the second the first feelings of love for the bride to begin the new life of partnership with her husband. The third verse describes the bride's detachment from external influences as she becomes more devoted to her husband, living only with and for him. The fourth verse speaks of the perfect love in which there is no feeling of separation between them.

This human analogy also explains the four stages of spiritual transformation, the final having achieved the complete union with God and the perfect joy of His love.

After the completion of Lavan, the first five and the last stanza of the hymn, Anand Sahib, two hymns about the successful completion of the wedding ceremony and the fulfilment of every body's wishes are sung. Then the final Ardas is conducted with the whole congregation standing in prayer. After this, the final reading from Guru Granth Sahib is done, followed by the distribution of the sacred pudding (Parshad) to the bride and groom and to all congregants.

After the completion of the religious part of the ceremony, the parents of the bride garland the couple and ceremonially feed them bits of laddoo sweets. Other relatives follow in giving gifts of money to them. In some gurdwaras, this part of the social ceremony takes place outside the prayer hall.



Some families choose to have a festive langar (food at the gurdwara) which is religiously preferred. Others choose banqueting halls and hotels for lunches, lavish festivities and entertainments to celebrate the wedding

G. Doli/ Send-off

Again this is a cultural aspect of the wedding.

Doli, the sending off of the bride is usually done from the bride's home. This can be very moving as the bride's parents, brothers and sisters and other relatives find it very emotional to see her leaving the family residence for good and to start a new life with her husband and his family. From then on she comes back to parental home as a visiting daughter. Before she gets into the specially decorated car with her husband, she throws behind her handfuls of rice as she begins to walk towards the exit door, a symbol of wishing her parental home plenty and prosperity. There are goodbye hugs and tears as she gets ready for departure while emotional songs are sung about this moment of leaving.

As the car departs, the groom's father may throw handfuls of coins towards people gathered to view the departure and the children usually run to collect them. In India it is usually poor people and children who make a dash for the coins. Workers who help are also rewarded.

The bride's family gathers back into the house, feeling emotions of both sadness at the sending off of their girl and the relief at the successful completion of the wedding day in the family.



ZOROASTRIAN WEDDINGS

Marriage is considered to be a divinely ordained event in the life of a Zoroastrian for it is said that Ahura-Mazda (God) revealed to Prophet Zarathushtra, that not only is marriage a righteous act but it is a commitment that makes even the earth feels joyous and happy.

It is a sacrament, a sort of holy sacrifice in order to share one's possessions with another, a holy union of two souls where love is sacrifice. The Zoroastrian stand –point is against treating it as a social or legal contract only. Marriage follows Divine path of God's own two aspects, life and form, in order to procreate the world. There is thus this lofty ideal – a perpetual harmonious blending of consciousness of two souls aspiring to make others happy. Viewed in this light, marriage is an important part in our life. According to Zoroastrianism marriage is a sacred duty, a blessing and also an opportunity for struggle against selfish isolation. The community must counteract the tendency among modern youths to treat marriage as a mere social companionship with a light heart or as an occasion of merriment. The sacramental character of wedlock should provide the correct background (a) the invisible presence of God (b) the solemn pledge to work together “till death us do us apart” (c) and, as the ritual points out, to multiply each one's potential for righteous merit by a family life of love and mutual understanding.

Prophet Zarathushtra, himself, declared in his divinely inspired hymns, the Gathas.

“I say these words to you, marrying brides and bridegrooms! Impress them in your mind. May you two enjoy the life of good mind by following the laws of religion. Let each one of you clothe the other with righteousness. Then assuredly there will be a happy life for you.”

A. Choosing a partner

Matches are generally arranged by the parents with the consent of their children, though, now a days, there are many cases of marriages where marrying couples make their own choice. Mutual friends of the two families generally carry messages and bring about the arrangement. It is a religious duty, recommended by religious scriptures, a Zoroastrian considers it a meritorious act to help his co-religionists to marry. The Vandidad, our holy scripture, says: “If a coreligionist, be he brother or friend comes to thee with a desire for a wife, get him married to a wife. To bring about the marriage of a maiden, who has reached her puberty, with a good righteous man, is considered to be a very meritorious act.” The marriageable Age at present is generally after 21 for the males and after 18 for the females.

B. Engagement ceremony

When the match is arranged, an auspicious day is fixed for the engagement ceremony. Now a days, the parties generally fix the days most convenient to them. But still it is not rare, especially in India, parents of the bride and bridegroom to resort to astrologers to name one or more auspicious days for the engagement or marriage or such other auspicious events.

On the engagement day, at first, the ladies of the bridegroom's family go to the house of the bride and make her a money present in silver coins. Then the ladies of the bride's family go to the house of the bridegroom and make him a similar present. These reciprocal presents of silver coins form the only important part of the ceremony. Nuptial songs are generally sung on these occasion.

The ladies return to their houses, after a little refreshment, mostly consisting of fish, curd, plantains and sweets.

C. Pre-marriage rituals

The nuptial ceremonies of the marriage day are preceded by several other ceremonies,

- (a) The Divo or the kindling of a lamp:- The next ceremonial occasion is that of Divoi.e. a light. It is so called, because early in the morning of a day fixed for the occasion, an oil lamp is lit in the house of each party. The ladies of each of the two families go in turn to the house of the other, and place a silver coin in the lamp there. This occasion is considered more important than that of engagement ceremony, because, on it, formal presents of clothes and rings are made. When the matches are arranged, the betrothal is hastily determined upon, to give a formal stamp, as it were, to the arrangement. The parties then have no time to prepare mutual presents and gifts; so, this second occasion, the day for which is fixed leisurely, is more important than the engagement, for formal presents of gifts. The first wedding rings are generally presented by both parties on that day.



- (b) The Adarni:- The next important occasion is that of Adarni. It is the occasion, on which,

the dowry given by the bride's father, is presented to the bridegroom's family. On several other occasions of holidays between the betrothal day and the marriage day, several presents are sent to each other's family. The marriage occasion is one, when the mothers of the bride and bridegroom, expect presents of clothes from their own parents. If the parents are dead, it is considered the duty of the brother or brothers to present a suit or suits of clothes to sister. A nuptial song is generally sung on such an occasion.

- (c) An auspicious day is fixed for the marriage. In some families, even now, it is the astrologer who determines which day is auspicious for the marriage. The new moon day and the full moon day are auspicious. Tuesdays are in auspicious. The marriage festivities generally last for four days. The first of these is called 'Mandav-saro', when a twig of a tree, generally a mango tree, is planted near the door, symbolic of a wish for fertility.
- (d) The second and the third days are known as 'Varadh-patra' days when religious ceremonies in honour of the dead are performed.

Coming to the ceremonies of the day of marriage itself, the bride and the bridegroom take a sacred bath known as Nahan.

The bride is dressed in a white sari with gold embroidery woven into it. She partially covers her head with part of the sari draped over it. The jewellery worn by the bride is given to her by the parents of the groom.

The bridegroom puts on the usual ceremonial dress, which is a loose flowing dress. This flowing dress is always white in colour.

In Zoroastrianism, the colour white is regarded as a symbol of purity and hence its importance on all ritualistic occasions.

The ritual of the wedding brings about the union of a couple in the physical as well as the spiritual worlds. The ritual surrounding the marriage ceremony is imbued with significance appertaining to the practice of the Zoroastrian religion. There are two ceremonial silver trays which the lady members for the respective families, bring in procession with them. Silver trays contain egg, coconut, rice grains, beaker of water, rose petals and sugar. These are meant to symbolize life giving force,



inner and outer worlds, joy, and sweetness.

After the assembly is seated, first the bridegroom comes at the assembly hall. He is welcome there by the bride's mother. A fresh vertical mark with kumkum (vermillion powder) is made upon his forehead, and a little rice is stuck upon the moist kumkum mark and thrown over his head. Rice is considered to be the symbol of plenty and prosperity. Hence the showering of dry rice over a person is the usual Zoroastrian practise of ritually invoking blessings on all auspicious occasions. The officiating priests also, in performing the religious ceremony, and in invoking the blessings of God upon the couple, sprinkle rice over them. Before the recital of the marriage blessings, the bride and the bridegroom also throw upon one another a handful of rice.

The mother of the bride takes an egg in her hand and passes it in a clockwise manner seven times around the bridegroom's head and then thrown upon the ground and broken.. A coconut is then similarly passed round the head seven times and broken. A little water is then poured in a tray, which is passed round the head seven times, and then the water is thrown at the feet of the bridegroom. After the welcoming ceremonies on the threshold, the bridegroom is made to cross the threshold without placing his foot upon it. The bride also goes through the same welcoming ceremonies by bridegroom's mother and cross the threshold. The threshold is crossed with the right foot, which is always considered auspicious.

The Zoroastrian marriages are generally performed in the evening just a little after sunset. It is just the time when day and night unite. So, perhaps that hour is chosen to indicate, that just as day and night, light and darkness, unite together and melt into each other, so the marrying couple may unite together in prosperity and adversity, in happiness and grief, in danger and safety.

The bridegroom takes his seat first, and waits for the bride, who comes in, after a short time, to take her seat.

To make the bridegroom wait for the bride for some time, seems to be a custom prevalent among many people. Among the Zoroastrians of Iran, when, at the marriage time, the members of the bridegroom's family go to ask her to be present for the marriage, the bride does not go at once. Her relatives keep her away and say



that “She has gone to the garden for picking flowers,” or that “She has gone to her brother's.” When the match is arranged, a few members of the bridegroom's family go to the bride's house to have her final consent. When they ask her, “Are you willing to marry such and such person? She is not expected to reply at once. The question is repeated several times, and then finally she replies in the affirmative in a low voice.

The bridegroom sits on the right hand of the bride. The bridegroom and the bride take their seats facing the East. There are two stools on one side of each of the chairs. On these are placed two metallic trays full of rice, which is to be thrown by the officiating priests over the couple while reciting their marriage benedictions. On the stool by the side of the chair on which the bride is to take her seat, stands a small metallic pot containing ghee (clarified butter) and molasses. Ghee being a soft, slippery substance made out of milk, is considered to be a symbol of gentility, courtesy and obedience. Molasses being a sweet substance is a symbol of sweetness and good temper. So, these two substances are produced by the family of the bride as symbols of good omen, wishing gentleness, peace and contentment to the couple.



D. The Hathevaro Ritual

Before the benedictions are recited, the bridegroom and bride are seated on chairs facing each other. They are made to hold the right hand of each other in the form of a handshake, with grains of rice in the left hand. Two priests, parents/guardians, a witness for each of them and relatives stand around them. The witnesses hold a piece of cloth, passing between the bridegroom and the bride in such a way that they are not able to see each other. The piece of cloth serves as a veil between them. The rear border of the coat of the bridegroom and the sari of the bride are tied together in a knot.

The officiating priest recites 'Yatha ahu vairyo' prayer and ties the hands of the bridegroom and the bride with thread from a cotton thread ball. He then recites 'Yatha ahu vairyos' and passes the cotton thread from the right hand side of the bridegroom to the right hand side of the bride with the help of parents/guardians, witnesses and the other priest. The other priest also recites 'Yatha ahu vairyos'. Seven rounds of cotton thread are thus wound round and thereafter the thread is detached from the cotton thread ball. The bridegroom and the bride throw grains of rice on each other and the piece of cloth between them is removed.

The above ceremony has following significance:

The bridegroom and the bride are two different persons who are so far considered not intimately connected.

Their right hands are clasped together in shake-hand with thread to them and the knot between their garments signifies that they are to remain united throughout their lives and to be intimate with each other.

The ceremony is performed in the presence of a witness from each side and of parents/guardians and relatives of the bridegroom and the bride, showing that they have their blessings on the new couple.

E. The marriage contract

The two chairs are now placed side by side within the encirclement of the cotton threads. Both the bride and groom now sit facing the two priests who stand before them. The main officiating priest who stands before the couple, chants (in prayer), “May the Creator, the Omniscient Lord, grant upon thee, progeny of children, and grandchildren, plenty of means to provide yourselves with heart ravishing friendship, bodily strength, long life and an existence of a hundred and fifty years...”.

Before the actual benediction is given, the main officiating priest asks the witnesses of the respective couple as to whether they, the couple, have agreed to join hands in matrimony. Upon their consent, the bride and groom are asked thrice to make certain that they have agreed to marry of their own free will and choice.

Then follows the recital, by both the officiating priests, of the Paevandnameh or Ashirwad (i.e. benediction), which is an address made up of admonitions, benedictions and prayers.

The marriage ritual ends with a final short benediction known as the Doa Tan-Dorosti in which the priests ask for happiness, virtue, wealth, good health and a long wedded life to be bestowed upon the couple.

Upon completion of the formal wedding ceremony, the bride and groom exchange rings.

Before the marriage, the bride and groom were two people living their own separate individual lives. After the marriage, they become united through the sacred nuptial bond and are on the verge of beginning a new life together.

CHAPTER 3

BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS



BAHA'I BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS



Origin

The Baha'i faith was founded by Baha'u'llah in Iran in 1863. The followers of Baha'u'llah were descended from the Bábís (believers in the Báb who foretold the mission of Baha'u'llah). There are 6 million Bahá'ís in the world, in 235 countries and around 6,000 live in Britain.

Beliefs

Bahá'ís believe there is one God and that all the universe and creation belong to him; God is transcendent, omnipotent, perfect and has complete knowledge of life. All human beings are different, but equal; there should be no inequality between races or sexes. The central idea of the faith is that of unity. Bahá'ís believe that people should work together for the common benefit of humanity. Each human being has an immortal soul. The soul is the spiritual reality of a person, which does not die when their body dies. It moves to another plane of existence, which we cannot understand while we are on earth. The soul does not live in the body but is connected with it in a way that is not explained. This connection begins at the moment of conception. There is clearly great continuity between the experiences of the soul during our bodily life and the after-life. Bahá'ís believe that a good marriage will continue as a bond between two souls after bodily death.

God reveals his divine purpose through his manifestations. Their writings give guidance for the spiritual progress of individuals and by doing so help to shape society. The Manifestations of God include: Adam, Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, The Báb, Baha'u'llah and many more not mentioned.

Daily life

“To be a Bahá'í simply means to love the whole world; to love humanity and try to serve it; to work for universal peace and universal brotherhood.”

Bahá'ís concentrate on the betterment of the world, through pure and goodly deeds and through commendable and seemly conduct.

Bahá'u'lláh's taught that 'religion should be the cause of love and unity' are reflected in the worldwide Bahá'í community. Positive social change is, from a Bahá'í perspective, a challenge that requires the world's different peoples to regard each other as one human family, and to be genuinely concerned for the prosperity and wellbeing of every member of that family. This



viewpoint empowers individuals and communities, no matter how small or poor, to seek God's inspiration in making a difference.

Prayers and worship

For Baha'is, the purpose of life is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual strengths and virtues, to know and to love God and progress spiritually. Prayer and meditation are the primary tools for spiritual development.

Bahá'ís must pray and study from the revealed words of the Bahá'í scriptures daily.

"I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth.

There is none other God but Thee, the He lp in Peril, the Self-Subsisting."

Baha'is sincerely believe in the omnipotence of God and hence do not have local temples or set places of worship for daily prayers. In north London, however, there is a place of special interest for prayer and reflection. This is the Guardian's resting place. The Guardian, is a title given to Bahá'u'lláh's great grandson who passed away in London in 1957.

Diet & Health

There are no dietary restrictions in the Bahá'í Faith; however Bahá'ís recognize the vital importance of diet and nutrition in promoting health and preventing illness. The consumption of alcohol, intoxicants and habit-forming drugs is prohibited unless prescribed by a qualified physician.

Each year from March 2nd to 20th, Bahá'ís over the age of fourteen abstain from food and drink between sunrise and sunset. The purpose of the fast is spiritual – a symbolic reminder of the ease with which we fulfil physical desires and, perhaps, neglect spiritual ones

Children

The Baha'i community places great emphasis on the moral and spiritual education of children and youth, with a focus on providing ongoing opportunities for developing a sense of world citizenship and a lifelong commitment to serve humanity.

Marriage and Divorce

A Baha'i marriage should join the participants in both body and spirit, in a 'spiritual relationship and everlasting union'. Baha'is disapprove strongly of divorce.



Social life

Bahá'ís are encouraged to consort with all people in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship. They endeavour to spiritually uplift society at large, by offering small community study circles, devotional gatherings, neighborhood moral and spiritual education classes for children, and gatherings for youth. Learning is facilitated by local community members who complete tutor training programs and subsequently engage the wider community in creative, culturally appropriate applications of development activities.

Community life

The centre piece of Bahá'í community life is the nineteen day feast. Held once every 19 days, it is the community 's regular gathering. The Baha'i Faith works on a calendar of nineteen months of nineteen days, with either four or five Intercalary Days between. The number nineteen was considered sacred to the Bab, the forerunner to Baha'u'llah. Welcoming to adults and children, the nineteen day feast promotes and sustains the unity of the local community.



Sacred Days

There are few rituals in the Bahá'í Faith and no clergy. There are eleven holy days in the Bahá'í calendar. Work or study should be suspended on nine of those days. On these days, the community holds observances that are open to all.

Death

Bahá'ís believe that the soul is eternal and that the physical body that remains should be treated with respect. Baha'i funeral services are simple and dignified. the conduct of the service and arrangements for interment may be left to the relatives of the deceased in consultation with the local Bahá'í community (LSA). Embalming and cremation are prohibited. The body should be buried within one hour's journey from the place of death.

Baha'is and other faiths

Baha'is have a very open attitude to other faiths, and are expected to treat members of other faiths with friendship and peace. Baha'i teaching makes it clear that no group should regard itself as superior to any other and that any law or practice that causes a group of human beings to be at a disadvantage is fundamentally immoral and wrong. The Baha'i community has been particularly active in the field of *human rights* and believes that the world should create a 'culture of human rights'



BUDDHIST BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS

Origin

Buddhism means 'path of the Enlightened One', was founded by Gautama Buddha (566 to 486 BCE), born as a prince to the parents, who were believed to have followed the Sramana tradition of Parsvanath (23rd tirthankara of Jains). It has 151, 816 followers in Britain according to the 2001 census and about 376 million followers worldwide. The two main Buddhist sects are Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism, but there are many more. Beliefs: Buddhism is a spiritual tradition that focuses on personal spiritual development and the attainment of a deep insight into the true nature of life. It teaches that all life is interconnected, and the path to Enlightenment is through the practice and development of morality, meditation and wisdom. Nothing is permanent; everything is transitory; the world is a chain of interdependent momentary events; everything derives from an antecedent condition, which ceases after producing its consequence. The soul is impermanent; it is a stream of consciousness; and attachment to the world produces suffering. Buddhism does not believe in God, the Supreme Being, but believes in a state of godliness, nirvana, which any person can achieve; however, later Buddhists seem to accept Buddha himself as God. The basic characteristics of Buddha's teachings are four noble truths and the eightfold path.

Four noble truths

There is untold suffering everywhere in the world. The sufferings are due to a twelve-fold chain of causation involving the old age, death, birth, rebirth, sensory enjoyments, attachment, actual sensual pleasures, the senses, the psycho-physical being, initial consciousness of the embryo, past karma and ignorance. Ignorance is the root cause of suffering, which is in fact self-created. Ignorance causes evil: desires, greed and hatred. There is an eightfold path to remove suffering and obtain happiness:

Eightfold path

is based on ethical conduct (sila), mental discipline (samaadhi) and wisdom (prajnaa). Ethical conduct by: right speech, right action (avoiding harm to living beings, stealing, false speech and inappropriate sexual relations, intoxicants) and right living; *Mental discipline* by: right effort (prevention of evil and stimulation of auspicious thinking), right mindfulness (total vigilance over the activities of mind, body and speech) and right



concentration (meditational training); *Wisdom* by: right understanding (of reality) and right thoughts (of unselfishness, compassion and detachment).

Buddhism believes in *karma*, and that everyone has to suffer or enjoy the consequences of their actions, except detached ones, either in this life or in lives hereafter. Exhaustion of the fruits of *karma* is essential for *nirvana*, a state of perfection and bliss, and it can be achieved even in this life by the observance of the eightfold path. The three jewels of Buddhism are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Modern and Mahayana Buddhists adore and worship the Buddha, the *arhat* and Bodhisattvas, and perform temple rituals. The Buddhist *sangha* consists of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen.

Becoming a Buddhist

Anyone who wishes to follow Buddha's teachings can join a Buddhist Organisation. Admission to the *monastic order* involves: Renunciation of the secular life and Acceptance of monasticism. Some Buddhists regard themselves as *converts*, i.e. have actually renounced or rejected the religion they were born into, and taken up Buddhism. Others, however, do not feel this sense of rejecting anything. Buddhism does not demand a commitment to it alone, to the exclusion of anything else, and there are many who happily harmonise more than one faith or way of life within themselves. For example, there are westerners of the Judaeo-Christian traditions who maintain their faith yet supplement it with the practice of Buddhist meditation.

Customs and way of life

A Buddhist is supposed to refrain from: harming living beings, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct and misuse of senses, harmful speech, and drink or drugs which cloud the mind; and observe the rituals of;

1. *Venerating the Buddha*, the exchange of gifts to the monastic order, pilgrimage and ordination
2. *Sacred mandala*: A symbolic picture of the universe representing an imaginary palace that is contemplated during meditation to help transform ordinary minds into enlightened ones and to assist with healing.
3. *Meditation & Worship*



Worship

Buddhists can worship both at home or at a temple. There are many forms of worship such as devotion to Buddha and to Bodhisattvas (Scriptures), and recitation of mantra (sacred word or phrase).

At home: Buddhists will often set aside a room or a part of a room as a shrine. There will be a statue of Buddha, candles, and an incense burner.

Temples: Buddhist temples are designed to symbolise the five elements: Fire, Air, Earth (symbolised by the square base), Water, Wisdom (symbolised by the pinnacle at the top). All Buddhist temples contain an image or a statue of Buddha.

Holy texts

are in Pali language (translation in English available). They are: *The Southern Canon: Tipitaka* (three baskets containing palm leaf manuscript): *Vinay-pitaka, Sutta-pitaka & Abhidhamma-pitaka* and The Northern Canon: *Agama and Sutras*

Festivals

include *Dharma Day* (to mark Buddha's first sermon - July/August), *Kathina* (largest alms-giving ceremony (October/November), *Sangha Day* (November), *Parinirvana Day* (nirvana of Buddha 15th February), *Wesak* (Buddha's Birth Day in May)

Celebration in Britain: There is much preparation and excitement around the Buddhist festivals that take place in British temples and monasteries at various times of the year. Food is prepared at or taken to the temples, and gifts are presented by lay people to the monks of money, sometimes robes, household goods, and food for the kitchen storeroom.

Diet

Buddhists are vegetarians, but some will take meat of the animals that are not killed for them. Alcohol and habit forming drugs are strictly prohibited. Smoking is discouraged.

Buddhism and other faiths

Buddhist active part in interfaith activities; respect others faiths and are expected to treat members of other faiths with friendship and peace.

CHRISTIAN BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS



Origin

Christianity began as a Jewish religious group about 2,000 years ago, following interpretations from the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Christians base their beliefs about Jesus on the Bible. This tells the story of His birth, life, teachings and death and resurrection. It is the most popular religion in the world with over 2 billion adherents and with 42 million in Britain. In the UK there are many Christian denominations; these include: The Church of England (the Anglican Church); The Catholic Church; The Orthodox Churches, The Methodist Church; The United Reformed Church; The Baptist Union; The Salvation Army, The Pentecostal Churches, the Quakers and many other groups.

Beliefs

Christians believe that Jesus was the Son of God sent by Him to the earth to save humanity from the consequences of its sins; and believe that Jesus gave his life on the Cross (the Crucifixion) and rose from the dead on the third day (the Resurrection). Jesus's death and resurrection is at the very heart of the Christian faith. Christians believe that the soul is immortal and that death is not the end and that there is a life after earthly death. On the day of final judgement, there will be resurrection and all the souls will be reunited with their respective bodies and righteous ones will be sent to heaven; sinful ones will descend to hell. Christianity emphasises God's forgiveness even to sinful souls. Some groups believe that souls which, although stained by sins, have shown sincere repentance and have undergone penance are sent first in Purgatory (a sort of half-way station) for purification; and when purified, they ascend to heaven.



God

Christians believe that there is only one God. Many Christians also believe in the Trinity, God as having three elements: God the Father, God the Son and The Holy Spirit. God is considered to be present today through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is evident in the actions of believers, who love Him with both heart and mind. Love is the essence of Christian teachings and extends to one's fellow beings.

Rituals in Christianity will vary within the different denominations and are the result of differences in beliefs.

Baptism

This may mark initiation into the Christian life and consists of ceremonial bathing or the sprinkling of clean water on the forehead or the whole body, as an outward sign of an inward commitment to the teachings of Jesus. Depending on the group this will happen as a child or as an adult.

Confirmation

This is a sacrament in some Christian traditions and is the ritual or rite of passage which signifies the strengthening or deepening one's relationship and commitment to God.

Monks and Nuns

In some traditions those desiring complete devotion to Jesus and follow the pattern of his life and work, take lifetime vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. They undertake 'solemn vows' and join an order of monks or nuns and stay in monastery.

Worship

Christians worship in a variety of religious buildings: they include cathedrals, churches, chapels (such as the churches of certain denominations, hospitals, prisons and large private houses). Some Christians use images extensively in worship, but they are careful to avoid 'idolatry'. Most churches have Sunday worship, and this may be entitled the Eucharist (re-enactment ritual of Jesus' Last Supper of bread and wine), Communion or Mass; there may be a reading from the Bible, a sermon, prayers and the singing of hymns, varying in style in differing Christian groups. Prayers may be individual or communal. Protestant services are generally more austere, while the Catholic and Orthodox Mass can be very elaborate. Their spiritual leaders are called priests or ministers, sometimes are addressed as Father. Some groups in Christianity have a structured hierarchy, and use titles to accord seniority and eligibility such as the Archbishop, Bishop, Archdeacon, Dean, Canon, Priest, Rector, Vicar, Deacon, and Brother. The Pope is the Head of Global Catholic Community.



Holy Books

The Christian holy book is the Bible, and consists of the Old and New Testaments. The Gospels, written by the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, tell the story and describe the significance of Jesus. The Book of Acts describes the spread of early Christianity. The Epistles recounts the problems and issues of early Christian communities. The Book of Revelations records a series of revelations, including the prediction of the end of the world and the Second Coming.

Festivals

Christians have many sacred days; the main holy days such as Easter and Christmas are important milestones in the Western secular calendar.

Ethics

Christianity teaches love and humility. The two teachings of 'love thy neighbour as thyself' and 'Turn the other cheek', are the prime examples of teaching of love and forgiveness. Christianity has also adopted the Ten Commandments from the Jewish tradition in a somewhat modified or 'Christianised' form as the basis of its ethical code. St Paul listed nine Virtues to be followed by Christians as a duty to God, society and to oneself: love, joy and peace in relation to God; patience, kindness and goodness in relation to others; faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in relation to oneself. Thus the ethical life of Christians emphasises the virtues of love, kindness, humility and self-control.

Diet

Christians generally do not have any dietary regulations however in some traditions in the season of Lent, the forty days before Easter, they may abstain from eating meat (and sometimes fish). Some Christians are vegetarians by choice.

Interfaith Relations

Christianity is an evangelical religion, but in Britain, for last few years, the Christian leaders have actively participated in the interfaith movement. They respect other faiths. They may allow the married partner of other faith to practise his / her religion. They are also active in the field of equality, human rights and justice.

Life style

The Cross is a symbol of Christianity depicted everywhere by believers in churches and cathedrals, in homes, in movies, paintings, music videos, in jewellery such as earrings and necklace. Christians believe in free society and individual freedom. Usually men and women are treated equally. In modern society the couple may share household duties and financial burden, but it depends upon the couple's background, culture and education. Normally both parents take interest in the empirical and spiritual education of their children. Most churches organise Sunday schools, youth groups and other activities for their children & young people.

Marriage and Divorce

Christians believe that marriage is a sacred institution, gift from God to build a family life. Getting married in a church, in front of God, friends and family is important and encouraged. The Church of England teaches that marriage is for life. It also recognizes that some marriages sadly do fail and, if this should happen, it has the structure to help and sympathise with those who find themselves in such a situation. The Church accepts that, in exceptional circumstances, a divorced person may marry again in church during the lifetime of a former spouse. Some denominations allow divorced people to remarry, however others do not.

Christian death and burial

When a Christian dies, it is seen as the end of his/her life on earth. Christians believe that there is life after death. A funeral is held by friends and family to grieve for the person who has died and give thanks for his/her life and the body may be buried or cremated usually within a week. The service is generally conducted by a priest or minister.



HINDU BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS

Origin of Hinduism cannot be traced; it is the religion (dharma - 'code of conduct', 'law', or 'duty') of the majority of people in India and Nepal and has over 900 million adherents worldwide including about 600,000 in Britain. It is closely associated with the other dharmic religions such as Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism and is 'a family of religions and way of life' with a great variety of beliefs and practices.

Sects

Hinduism have two major sects, *Saivism* and *Vaishnavism*, and many groups such as *Brahmo Samaj*, *Arya Samaj*, *Rama Krishna Mission*, *Swaminarayan*, *Brahma Kumaris*, *Harekrishna (ISKCON)*, *Sathya Sai Baba movement*, *Jalaram Bapa movement* and South Indian groups such as Balaji temple. All follow basic Hindu teachings and preaches basic moral values.

Beliefs

Hindus believe in the immortality of souls and their transmigration through many lives because of attached karma (attached, egoistic actions). The aim of human life is to annihilate *karma* and attain liberation (*moksha*) where the soul becomes free from worldly sufferings, is purified and achieves a state of bliss and oneness with God. Moksha can be attained by one of three paths: the path of knowledge (*jnaan maarga*, inner realisation), the path of detachment from actions (*karma maarga*) and the path of devotion to God (*bhakti maarga*). For inner realisation, Hinduism prescribes the various disciplines of yoga, austerities (*saadhanaa*) and meditation, thus many Hindu yogis or *saadhus* renounce the world to reside in the forests and mountains and practise the path of meditation for inner purity. Hindus also give great importance to external purity, bathing at home and in sacred rivers, to the purity of their food and the environment for the progress towards the path of purification.



God

Most Hindus believe in a *Supreme* God, whose qualities and forms are represented by the multitude of deities which emanate from him. God possesses three aspects: creator, preserver and destroyer, the creator is *Brahma*, the preserver is *Vishnu* and the destroyer is *Shiva* (Mahesh); these three constitute the Trinity of Hinduism, which are encompassed in one supreme Lord Vishnu who is loving, compassionate, benevolent and virtuous. Hinduism is a

polytheistic religion, though such is its tolerance of that it encompasses beliefs, which are monotheistic and atheistic. Hindus worship a host of gods and goddesses such as Brahma, Vishnu (and his incarnations such as Rama and Krishna), Shiva, Ganesha, Kartikeya, Hanuman, Parvati, Durga, Kali, Sarasvati and Laxmi. God is described in the *Bhagavad Gita* as the inner dweller, the soul of the whole universe, infinite, external and all pervading.

Holy Texts

The beliefs and practices of Hinduism can be traced, in part, in its vast sacred literature: the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas*, the *Dharma Sutras*, the *Dharma Sastras*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which includes the *Bhagvad Gita*. The main Hindu texts are the Vedas and their supplements (books based on the Vedas). Veda is a Sanskrit word meaning 'knowledge'. The *Bhagvad Gita* advocates the moral path of selfless detached action, setting out the duties of different castes. The *Rigveda* and *Upanishads* contain the core of Hindu morality; the *Dharma Sastras* describe the ethical virtues and duties of all castes: *braahman*, *ksatriya*, *vaisya* and *sudra*.

Ethics

The general duties prescribed for all Hindus are the practices of *ahimsaa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmcarya* (celibacy) and *aparigraha* (detachment). Hinduism emphasises the virtues of love, compassion, purity, self-restraint and philanthropy, charity and social service in addition to the above five general duties.

Hinduism also describes the different duties for each stage of life:

The stage of *brahmacarya* (up to 25 years): the life of a student.

The stage of *grahastha* (26—50 years): the life of a householder,

The stage of *vanaprastha* (51—75 years): retirement for self-discipline, simpler life.

The stage of *sanyaasa* (75 onwards, or at any time): renunciation, the life of a *Sadhu* or *Yogi*.

Worship and devotion

The path of devotion to God includes prayers, worship and complete surrender, in daily practice. *Pujaa* is performed in the home, in temples or at places of pilgrimage, where certain



heavenly beings, the Sun, Indra, Varun, may also be worshipped. Offerings of sacred substances and food are given during *pujaa* and afterwards, the food is distributed among the family members. Most temples have a *brahmin* priest, who is responsible for the maintenance of the temple, making offerings on behalf of devotees and performing rituals. Some rituals can be extremely elaborate such as the *yagnas*, in which sacred offerings, such as sandalwood, to the sacred fire are made to purify the self and the family members.. Hindu prayers largely consist of the silent repeated recitation of *mantras* such as “Ram! Ram! Or Krishna! Krishna!” and reading passages from the *Ramayana* or *Gita*, *Bhajans* and sermons.

There are many Hindu temples in Britain; the most famous among them are Swaminarayan temple at Neasden, London, Hare Krishna temple at Watford and Balaji temples near Birmingham.

Holy Days

Hindus observe many sacred days such as the *Makar Sankrant*, *Vasant Panchami*, *Mahashivratri*, *Holi*, *Swaminarayan Jayanti*, *Rama Navami*, *Hanuman Jayanti*, *Raksha Bandhan*, *Janmashtami*, *Navaratri*, *Dassera* and *Diwali*.

Life style

Hindus observe many sacred duties and social rituals such as those for marriage and death, and of wearing the sacred thread (*janoi*). Generally, Hindu society is patriarchal, however women are respected and their views are noted, particularly from older women. Since the beginning of this century, women have been given a greater role in the management of the households, businesses, society and the state.

Rites and Rituals

Hindu rites and rituals vary because of background, castes and regions. Hindu baby rites are: *Garbhadana* (conception), *Punsavana* (foetus protection), *Simantonnyana* (satisfying the craving of the pregnant mother), *Jatakarma* (at birth, whispering the name of God in the child's ear), *Namakarna* (naming ceremony), *Annaprasana*, (first taste of solid food). *Karnavedha* (ear-piercing ceremony) and *Mundan* (first haircut) and *Upanayana* (sacred thread).

Marriage is usually an arranged marriage; the divorce was rare, but now it is increasing. In Britain women are usually given equal status. The new generation of Hindu couples share domestic, financial and social duties.

After death body is *cremated* as soon as possible.

Hinduism and animals: Most Hindus are vegetarian. The doctrine of *ahimsa* leads Hindus to treat animals well; the cows are considered as a sacred animal, hence a Hindu will not eat beef.

MUSLIM BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS



Origin

Islam is the second largest religion in the world with over 1 billion followers, in the UK 1,591,000 Muslims (2001 Census). Islam means 'submission to the will of God'. Its followers are known as Muslims. Muslims believe that there is only one God. The Arabic word for God is Allah. Muslims believe its founder; Mohammed (571-632 CE) was the last prophet of the succession of Jewish and Christian prophets. Mohammed was born in Mecca. Over a period of twenty-three years, from the age of forty, through the Angel Gabriel, he received God's revelation, known as the *Qur'an* (Koran). He preached his message in Mecca, attracted followers, but because of growing resistance from established authorities, he migrated to Medina. This migration is known as the *Hijra*, the date from which the Muslim calendar begins.

Sects

Muslims are divided into many sects, for political rather than doctrinal reasons. Main among them are: *Sunni*: About 85% Muslims; they recognise the first four 'rightly guided' caliphs and the *Qur'an*, *Sunna*, *Qiyas* and *Ijma* as the four sources of law; *Shi'as*: About 15% Muslims: they believe the revelation was completed in the time of Mohammed and that he instituted a succession of individual Imams (spiritual leaders) within his family, such as Ali and his descendants, and the supreme authority of the *Qur'an*.



Shi'as are divided into different sects such as: *Ismaili Khojas*, *Zaidis*, *Wahhabis*, and *Ahmadiyas*. *Sufis* represent a mystical trend in Islam.

Beliefs

Muslims have six main beliefs: Belief in *Allah* as the one and only God; Belief in *angels*; Belief in the *Qur'an*; Belief in the *Prophets*, *Muhammad* as the final Prophet; Belief in the *Day of Judgement* (The day when the life of every human being will be assessed to decide whether they go to heaven or hell), and Belief in *Pre-destination*.

God: Allah is *eternal*, *omniscient*, *omnipotent* unique God; He is *creator* and *ruler* of everything in the Universe. Allah is merciful, just, rewards and punishes fairly; has no shape or form, can't be seen or heard. A believer can approach Allah by praying, and by reciting the *Qur'an*.

Jihad: The literal meaning of Jihad is struggle or effort. Muslims use the word Jihad to describe three different kinds of struggle: a believer's *internal struggle to live life as a good Muslim* by following the Qur'an; the *struggle to build a good Muslim society*; and *Holy war*: the struggle to defend Islam, with force if necessary. The internal Jihad is the one that Prophet Muhammad is said to have called the *greater Jihad*.

Hijab: Hijab is an Arabic word meaning barrier or partition. It is the principle of modesty and includes behaviour as well as dress for both males and females. The most visible form of hijab is the head covering that many Muslim women wear.

Niqab: is the term used to refer to the piece of cloth which covers the face worn by women across Saudi Arabia and the Indian subcontinent and many women in the West.

Sacred Texts

The *Qur'an* is the main holy book. It is permanent and unchangeable and contains guidance on ethics, human relationships, social justice, political principles, law, trade, commerce, and beliefs, philosophy and prayer. Because the Qur'an is viewed as the actual words of God (in Arabic), the learning and recitation of the Qur'an is the duty of all Muslims.

The framework within which Muslim life has evolved is the *Shari'ah* (law). The *Qur'an*, the *Sunna*, *Ijma* and *Qiyas* are the sources of *Shari'ah*. The *Sunna* is the example of the Prophet and his way of life, which acts as a model for Muslims. The traditions, words and actions of Mohammad and his companions are found in the *Hadith*. The *Ijma* is consensus of approval for particular aspects of *Shari'ah*. The *Qiyas* draws analogies between the *Qur'an*, *Sunna* and *Hadith* and contemporary circumstance, in order to interpret the *Shari'ah* in modern situations. Scholars advise on interpretations and the application of the *Shariah*.



Ethics

All aspects of a Muslim's life are governed by *Sharia*. Sharia law comes from a combination of sources including the *Qur'an* (the Muslim holy book), the *Hadith* (sayings and conduct of the prophet Muhammad) and *fatwas* (the rulings of Islamic scholars).

The five essential duties of a Muslim are known as 'Five Pillars' of Islam:

1. **Sahadah:** repetition of faith in the absolute oneness of 'Allah' and Mohammed as his messenger

2. *Salat*: observance of five daily prayers
3. *Zakat*: giving alms to the poor, as a religious tax, usually two and half percent of annual income
4. *Ramadan*: a month of fasting and spiritual discipline in the ninth month of the lunar calendar
5. *Hajj*: pilgrimage to Mecca and the Ka'bah (the house of God) at least once in a lifetime

Sometimes a 'Holy War' (*jihad*) against unbelievers to defend Islam is described as the sixth pillar and immediate entry to paradise is promised to those who die in a holy war; modern Islam interprets *jihad* as a war against sins and sinners for the cause of religion. Sincere observance of the above duties and leading a life in accordance with the Quar'an, is sufficient guarantee of heaven.

Muslim ethics are mainly social: such as hospitality; obedience to parents; avoidance of adultery, cheating and lying; and refraining from stealing, killing and murder. Islam forbids violence except in the name of religion, or self-defence. It teaches individual virtues such as refraining from intoxicating drinks and from the use of perfumed oils; and cultivates renunciation and non-attachment towards worldly possessions. It also regulates marriage, divorce, dowry, inheritance, funeral ceremonies, and practically every sphere of life including economics, family life and the behaviour of rulers.

Prayer

Prayer for a Muslim involves uniting mind, soul, and body in worship; so a Muslim carrying out these prayers will perform a whole series of set movements that go with the words of the prayer and put aside all worldly cares and thoughts so that they can concentrate exclusively on God. A Muslim prays as if standing in the presence of Allah. There is no need of a priest as an intermediary (the imam is simply a person who has knowledge about Islam). Muslims can pray anywhere, but it is especially good to pray with others in a mosque. Praying together in a congregation helps Muslims to realise that all humanity is one, and all are equal in the sight of Allah. Muslims must be clean before they pray. They make sure of this by performing ritual washing, called *Wuhu*. Mosques have washing facilities. Everyone sits on the floor and everywhere in the mosque is equal in status. Women can attend the mosque and when they do they sit separately from the men. This is out of modesty and to prevent any distraction. Usually women pray at home. Muslim religious prayer halls are known as *mosques* and spiritual leaders as *Imams*. They provide a number of services such as the channelling of alms (*zakat*) to the poor; providing Imams to visit Muslims who are sick in hospital or inmates in prison, instruction in the Arabic language, solemnisation of marriage and burial rites. Women do not attend the mosque regularly, and when they attend they sit separately. In Islamic countries, the public call to prayer from the mosques sets the rhythm of the day for the entire population, including non-Muslims.

Diet

Dietary rules are also an important aspect of Muslim values and ethics. The Qur'an prohibits consumption of meat or by-products of pigs and carnivorous animals, finned or scaly marine animals, meat of unlawfully (*haram*) slaughtered animals and alcohol. Meat obtained from the animals slaughtered, according to the teachings of Qur'an is deemed lawful (*halal*) meat, but when *halal* meat is unavailable, *kosher* meat is acceptable to some Muslims. All Muslims accept vegetarian food. Foods, which contain by-products of non-halal meat, such as cheese containing animal rennet, are prohibited. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims do not consume food or drink between dawn and sunset, although exceptions are made for children, the sick, pregnant women, the elderly and travellers.

Family Life

Islam confers equal dignity, the same religious duties and legal rights on both men and women. It views marriage and procreation positively and celibacy is discouraged, but Islamic law allows a man to have up to four wives, but because of strict regulations and financial constraints this is practically impossible in modern times. Social contact with persons of the opposite sex, other than in one's own family, is restricted. Muslims expect married partner and children to learn the Qur'an and its teachings and follow them.

Muslim birth rites: include simple rites for *welcoming* a child, *naming ceremony* on seventh day, *shaving the baby's head* after seven days, *circumcision* (known as *tahara*, meaning purification) any time after seven days to puberty for baby boys and the *aqeeqah* on the seventh day slaughtering a sheep and the distribution of meat to relatives and neighbours (in Britain the meat is ordered at the butchers). For the majority of Muslims, *circumcision* is seen as an introduction to the Islamic faith and a sign of belonging.

Festivals

Muslims have many festivals, principal among them are *Eid al-Fitr* (end of Ramadan), *Eid al-Adha* (end of hajj), fast of *Muharam* (Islamic New Year) and fasting during Ramadan.

Islam and animals

(There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings, but they are communities like you...Qur'an 6:38) Muslims believe that: all living creatures were made by Allah; animals exist for the benefit of human beings, but they must be treated with kindness and compassion; and Muslims are allowed to eat meat of the animal that has been killed according to Sharia law.

Sanctity of Life: Muslims believe that all human life is sacred because it is given by Allah, and that Allah chooses how long each person will live; hence suicide and euthanasia are explicitly forbidden.

JAIN BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS



Origin

The name Jainism comes from *Jina*, meaning 'victor' over the passions and the self. *Jinas* whom Jains call *tirthankaras* attained omniscience by shedding 'destructive' *karma* (obscurer of true nature of the soul) and taught the spiritual path of happiness and perfection to all humans. The origin of Jainism remains untraceable. Jains believe time rotates in a cycle, descending and ascending. In each half of the cycle twenty-four *tirthankaras* establish the fourfold order (*sangha*) consisting of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen; and revive the teachings of previous *tirthankaras*. The first *tirthankara* in this descending cycle was Risabhdeva, who is traditionally believed to have lived thousands of centuries ago, the twenty-third was Parsvanatha (c.870 BCE to 770 BCE) and the twenty-fourth (and last) was Vardhamana Mahavira (599 to 527 BCE), whose teachings the Jains follow.

The Jain population was very high in early centuries, but now it is about five million (2001 census; according to Jain Organisations 12 million) around the world; most Jains and all their ascetics (about 10,000) live in India; 80,000 in North America and 30,000 in the UK. Jainism is not a *proselytising* religion, but accepts any person who follows the path of the *Jinas* as Jain, irrespective of labels attached by birth or otherwise,

Mahavira's teachings

Mahavira became a *Jina* at the age of 42, was a great reformer and addressed the various problems of the day in India, such as the caste system, slavery, and equality of women, carnal desires, killing or harming life for religious rituals or pleasure of the senses. He taught acceptance of multiple views (*anekaantavada*) and qualifying dogmatic assertions (*syadavaada*), a spiritual democracy that made Jains tolerant to others.

Jain Sangha

This consists of male and female ascetics (*sadhu* and *sadhvi*) and male and female laity (*shravaka* and *shravika*). Mahavira attracted a large number of people, both men and women, to his teachings. Those who decided to follow the way of life like Mahavira, took total vows (*mahavrata*) became ascetics; others in view of their worldly duties, took them partially remained as lay people.

The vows are

Ahimsa (non-violence and reverence for all life)

Satya (truthfulness, communication in a pleasant and non-hurtful manner that is free from falsehood)

Asteya (not stealing or taking anything which belongs to others without their permission)

Brahmacharya (chastity and control over senses; for the ascetics total celibacy and for the laity faithfulness to one's spouse)

Aparigraha (non-attachment to material things)

Essential Duties

Lay Jains observe *six* essential *duties*: equanimity, veneration of the twenty-four *tirthankaras*, veneration of ascetics, penitential retreat, renunciation, meditation with bodily detachment, which are meant to enhance their quality of life, physically, mentally and spiritually. Some add donation for good causes as an essential duty.

Sects

In the 4th century CE, Jainism developed two major divisions Digambara (sky clad ascetics) and Svetambara (white robed ascetics). With the passage of time, both Digambara and Svetambara communities have continued to develop, almost independently of each other into different sects. Later on in 16th and 18th century two other major sects *Sthanakvasi* and *Terapanthi* developed. Except for minor differences of no importance, all of them believe in the same teachings and accept the same vows.



Beliefs

The universe: The universe as conceived by Jains has two parts: occupied and unoccupied and it consists of six substances: the soul, matter, medium of motion, medium of rest, space and time. All except the matter are formless. The soul is the living being (*jiva*) and the others are non-living substances (*ajiva*). Both *jiva* and *ajiva* are interdependent and everlasting. It is the attachment of non-living substance (*karma*) to the soul that causes apparent injustices of life, and an unending cycle of birth, death and rebirth in any destiny: heavenly, human, animal and plants or infernal as a mobile being with two to five senses or as an immobile being with one sense.

The aim of life

The Jain way of life aims to shed *karma* attached to the soul and manifest the soul's true characteristics: infinite bliss, infinite knowledge, amity and equanimity. It consists of the co-ordinated path of the 'Three Jewels': Right Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct. Right Faith is belief in the nine 'real entities' (living being, non-living being, merit, demerit, influx of *karma*, karmic bondage, stoppage of *karma*, shedding of *karma*, and liberation); Right

Knowledge is a proper grasp of the nine 'real entities'; and Right Conduct is the ethical code, behaviour and actions taught by the *Jinas* to liberate the soul from the karmic bondage.

Karma

Jainism describes *karma* as subtle matter, not perceptible to the senses, found everywhere in the cosmos and having the property of penetrating the soul and clouding its characteristics. The soul's activities cause vibrations in its structure, cause karmic particles to be attracted (*influx*) to it. If there is karmic matter around the soul, these particles will stick to it, but if it is absent as in liberated souls it will not stick. Benevolent acts cause good karma (merit), while sinful acts cause bad *karma* (demerit). Both merit and demerit keep the soul in the worldly cycle, they do not cancel each other out.



The quantity, the size, the type and the density of karmic particles determine the severity of *karmic bondage* and form in which the soul will transmigrate to the forthcoming life with its inherent passions. The external environments affect these passions, increasing or decreasing their severity and results. The Right Conduct can influence the karmic result and reduce its effects. On maturity karmic particles attached to the soul give results and shed, but one's activities cause inflow of new *karma*; and replenishment generated keeps the soul in bondage.

God

Jainism does not recognise an Almighty God or a Supreme Being as creator as God, but believes in godhood that can be attained by any one by following the teachings of the *Jina*; shed karma and liberate the soul. Jains worship *tirthankaras* as Gods, as examples to follow.

Temples & Worship

Jains have built thousands of beautiful temples in India; in Britain beautiful temples in Leicester and Potters Bar and about fifty temples in USA. Most of the Jain homes have a small shrine; their daily worship is usually individual; but on special days they may worship in congregation.

Holy Days

Jains observe many sacred days, the main among them are *Paryushana* (sacred days of fasting and forgiveness), *Mahavira Jayanti* (Mahavira's birth day) and Diwali (Mahavira's death anniversary). Their festivals are spiritual in nature aimed to shed karma and progress on the path of purification.

Jains observe, *Paryusana*, an annual period of atonement and repentance for trespassing *Jina's* teachings in the previous year, and of austerities to help shed accumulated karma and take positive steps to save the lives of voiceless creatures; of showing amity to fellow Jains, of

forgiveness to all, of austerity, and of visiting neighbouring temples. On the final day (*samvatsari*) Jains seek forgiveness from all for any harm, which they have caused knowingly or unknowingly and forgive those who have harmed them saying '*micchami dukkadam*'.

Life Style

Jains are lacto-vegetarians; they care for the environment and are involved in human and animal welfare. Strict Jains will avoid root vegetables. The guiding principle of their way of life is *ahimsa* (non-violence and reverence for all life) and their conviction in the phrase '*parasparopagraho jivanam*' meaning interdependence of life on each other. "Live and Help to Live" is their motto. Jains will try to avoid harm to all living beings as far as possible and observe friendship to all and malice to none. The Jain way of life is not at odds with normal everyday life. It is an ethical doctrine with self-discipline as its core. Jains perform Penitential retreat (*Pratikramana*) daily in the morning and evening and ask for forgiveness for their transgressions, perform penance, and see that such aberrations are not repeated.



Jains will avoid professions or businesses where there is apparent violence. They are law abiding citizens with practically no criminal record.

They worship either at a temple or at home every morning, meditate and then start the day's work. They believe in simplicity, helping others, in philanthropy and live accordingly.

Marriage and divorce

Most of the Jain marriages are arranged marriages within the community. The divorce rate in the Jain community is very low. The women have equal status. The new generation of Jain couples share domestic, financial and social duties. Interfaith marriages are discouraged, but they are accepted by most families and the community.

Death

Jains believe transmigration of the soul is due to karmic bondage; after death the soul occupies a new body according to its karma and hence they accept the death philosophically. They pray for the peace of the departed soul. After death the body is cremated as soon as possible.

JEWISH BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS



Origin

Judaism was founded by Moses, although Jews trace their history back to Abraham. It originated in the Middle East over 3500 years ago. Jewish population is about 13 million in the world, most residing in the USA and Israel and 267,000 in the UK. It has four main sects: Conservative Judaism; Orthodox Judaism; Liberal Judaism; Reform Judaism; and others such as Humanistic Judaism; Modern Orthodoxy; Reconstructionist Judaism.

Beliefs

Judaism is a monotheistic religion that believes in a single God who not only created the universe, but with whom every Jew can have an individual and personal relationship. The Jewish relationship with God is a covenant relationship. In exchange for the many good deeds that God has done and continues to do for the Jewish People, the Jews keep God's laws and bring holiness into every aspect of their lives. Judaism teaches its followers to live an active social life of righteousness, love and kindness for the welfare of society and God's creations. Judaism does not teach asceticism. The basic ethical virtues consist of justice, mercy, righteousness, humility, and holiness.



God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses for the guidance of the children of Israel. They are: “You shall have no other gods except me; You shall not make any graven image; You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; Remember the holiness of the Sabbath day, the seventh day of the week; Honour your father and your mother; You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear a false witness against others; You shall not envy those things, which belong to others”.

Judaism believes in the immortality of the soul, and life after death in heaven or hell, in accordance with earthly deeds. Some traditional Jews believe that one day a Messiah will appear on earth to redeem the Jews to make the world full of righteousness and goodness, and release Israel from all its sufferings.

Sacred Texts

The Judaism accepts the Hebrew Bible as one of their sacred text and has developed the Jewish scriptures known as the *Tanakh* that has three constituents: the teaching (*Torah*), the prophet (*Nevi'im*) and the writings (*Ketuvim*). The Torah consists of the five books of Moses (*Genesis*,

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) which contain God's revelation to Moses and include commandments on ethics, spirituality, dietary regulations, community and social life. The *Nevi'im* consists of the books of the prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the related historical book of Joshua, Judges and Kings. The *Ketuvim* are the remaining Biblical books, which contain works such as the *Psalms*, the *Song of Songs*, and the books of *Ruth and Esther*.

The *Tanakh* is complemented by the *Talmud*, which contains the *Mishnah*, the summary of religious and civil law, and the *Gemara*, the commentary and discourses on the *Mishnah*. Other important scriptures are the *Midrash*, the rabbinic interpretation of the texts, and includes moral teachings, legends and parables from a variety of great rabbis; and *Halacha* (Jewish law), the life of the Jewish community, the interpretation of Jewish law and its practice.



Worship

Judaism emphasises service and prayer to God; the purpose of creation is the service of God and living a life of righteousness. Traditionally, Jews pray three times a day, evening, morning and noon. Jewish prayers are petitional and devotional, may be individual or collective. Prayer requires conscious understanding the words uttered, careful utterance, humility and directing one's heart to God. Congregational prayer is usually undertaken in synagogues on the Sabbath and at festivals, and includes reading passages from the Torah. '*Shema*' (*Hear!*) is a daily prayer composed of three passages in the Torah, containing the basic affirmations of the Jewish faith.

The **Shabbat** (Sabbath) is central to the rhythm of Jewish individual, family and communal life. It is observed as a day of worship, rest and peace on Saturday, the seventh day, as this is believed to be the day on which God rested after creating the earth in six days. It begins half an hour before sunset on Friday evening and ends at nightfall on Saturday. During the Shabbat Jews are forbidden to engage in any activities which are considered as work. The Shabbat concludes with *Havdalah*, a ceremony, separating it from the working week.

The Sabbath is part of the deal between God and the Jewish People, so celebrating it is a reminder of the Covenant and an occasion to rejoice in God's kept promises.

Most Jewish people look forward to Shabbat all week. They see it as God's gift to his chosen people of a day when they take time out from everyday things to feel special. It is a time with no television, no rushing to the demands of the telephone or a busy work schedule. People don't think about work or other stressful things. It's an oasis of calm, a time of stillness in life. The traditional *Sabbath greetings* are *Shabbat Shalom* (Hebrew), or *Gut Shabbos* (Yiddish).

Synagogue

The principal place of communal Jewish worship is the synagogue, and in orthodox synagogues men and women are separated. Inside synagogues one will see symbols such as the seven-branched candlestick (*Menorah*); on a doorpost, a small box containing a parchment scroll with passages from scripture written on it (*Mezuzah*) (the *Mezuzah* is also affixed to the doorposts of Jewish homes); a perpetually burning light (*Ner Tamid*), and an 'ark' (*Aron*), a cupboard containing hand written scrolls of the Torah. Jews cover their heads during prayers and wear a special prayer garment (*tallit*) for some prayers.

Life Style and Customs

Jewish communities employ rabbis to teach and to preach, to take on pastoral duties and advise the community on Jewish law. Orthodox communities have only male rabbis, whereas progressive communities employ both men and women rabbis. Rabbis are well educated, require ordination and are paid a salary by the congregation. To administer Jewish law, a judge (*Dayan*) is appointed. Many synagogues have committees and employ part-time and full-time secretaries.



Judaism is very much a family faith; many Jewish religious customs revolve around the home. One example is the Sabbath meal, when families join together to welcome in the special day. Singles or others with no family around may form a group to celebrate Shabbat together.

Jewish custom asserts that male Jews should normally be *circumcised* on the eighth day after birth. At the age of thirteen, male Jews from orthodox communities and both sexes in progressive communities, ceremoniously, involve themselves in reading, in Hebrew, the weekly portion of the Torah Scroll.

Customs for women

Orthodox, and some other, Jews insist on a ritual bath (*mikveh*) to ritually cleanse 'unclean' women (before marriage, after menstruation and after childbirth), before they attend a religious ceremony, but Progressive



Jews are relaxed on this *injunction*. In progressive Judaism, both men and women are given equal opportunity to take part in the religious ceremonies; in the orthodox sector women do not participate in some religious ceremonies, but women have a key role in Jewish life because of their function in the family.

Who is a Jew? Jews believe that a Jew is someone who is the child of a Jewish mother; although some groups also accept children of Jewish fathers as Jewish. A Jew traditionally can't lose the technical 'status' of being a Jew by adopting another faith, but they do lose the religious element of their Jewish identity. Someone who isn't born a Jew can convert to Judaism, but it is not easy to do so.

Eruv

An eruv is an area within which observant Jews can carry or push objects on the Sabbath without violating a Jewish law that prohibits carrying anything except within the home. There are over 200 eruvs (or eruvim) in the world. Britain's first, and biggest, eruv was created in February 2003. The eruv has a boundary 11 miles long and encloses an area of 6.5 square miles. It covers Hendon, Golders Green and Hampstead Garden Suburb, together with parts of Childs Hill, Cricklewood, East Finchley, Finchley and Mill Hill.

Tefillin

(sometimes called phylacteries) are cubic black leather boxes with leather straps that Orthodox Jewish men wear on their head and their arm during weekday morning prayer. Observant Jews consider wearing tefillin to be a very great mitzvah (command).

Kippah (Yarmulke)

Orthodox Jewish men always cover their heads by wearing a skullcap known in Hebrew as a kippah or in Yiddish as a yarmulke. Liberal or Reform Jews see the covering of the head as optional. Most Jews will cover their heads when praying, attending the synagogue or at a religious event or festival. Wearing a skullcap is seen as a sign of devoutness and as an 'outward sign' of Jewish faith. Women also cover their heads by wearing a scarf or a hat.

Holocaust Memorial Day

The Jewish Community has its own memorial day for the Holocaust. Yom Ha-Shoah. Shoah is the Hebrew word for 'whirlwind' or 'destruction'. It is the term used to describe the conflagration that swept up six million Jewish souls between 1938 and 1945. Public institutions and major faiths participate in the service on this day to remind people the effects of such ghastly act of genocide and prayer to see that it never recurs.

Holy Days and Festivals

Jews celebrate many festivals; main ones are: the *Purim* (thanksgiving) and the *Pesach* or *Passover* (celebration of freedom, the exodus Israelites from Egypt) during spring; the *Shavuot* (commemoration of the Ten Commandments from God); *Rosh Hashanah* (the Jewish new year), *Yom Kippur* (the day of atonement) during autumn; *Sukkot* (to commemorate the years that the Jews spent in the desert on their way to the Promised Land) and the *Chanukah* (the festival of lights to commemorate the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem).

Dietary Regulations

Judaism has a series of dietary regulations: food is either permitted (*kosher*), forbidden (*treif*) or neutral (*parve*), but these restrictions apply to animal products only, and Jewish law prohibits the mixing of milk products with meat; for meat to be *kosher* the animal must have been humanely slaughtered in accordance with a particular ritual; fruits and vegetables are, by definition, *kosher*.

Animals

Judaism teaches that animals are part of God's creation and should be treated with compassion. It also teaches that it is acceptable to harm or kill animals if that is the only way to fulfil an essential human need. Human beings are therefore allowed to use animals for food and clothing - and to provide parchment on which to write the Bible, if that is the only way. Hunting for sport is forbidden. Animal experiments allowed if there is a real possibility of a benefit to human beings and if there is no unnecessary pain involved.

Interfaith Relations

The Jewish leadership encourages participating in the interfaith movement. They respect other faiths. They are also active in the field of equality, human rights and justice.

Marriage and Divorce

Judaism believes that marriage is a sacred institution, gift from God to build a family life and is for life. It also recognizes that some marriages sadly do fail and, if this should happen, it has the structure to help and sympathise with those who find themselves in such a situation. Jewish law requires a religious divorce after the breakdown of marriage.

Jewish death and burial

When a Jew dies, a funeral is held by friends and family to grieve for the person who has died and give thanks for his/her life and bury the body usually within a week. The service is conducted by the rabbi.



SIKH BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS

Origin

Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539 CE) in the Punjab, as an attempt to reconcile Hinduism and Islam, and was promoted by a succession of nine gurus, the last of whom was Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708 CE). Sikhism is a monotheistic religion believing in the oneness of God and of humanity and that divinity lies within oneself; its teachings as revealed to the Gurus are found in the holy Sikh scripture the 'Guru Granth Sahib' (*Adi Granth*), a copy of which is kept in every Gurudwara (Sikh temple).

Beliefs

Sikhism believes in humanity and its true nature, whereby human beings possess divine elements in the form of mind or soul (*mana* or *atman*), but the involvement of humans in evil passions and egoism, does not allow the divine element to reveal itself; thus, Sikhism emphasises self-purification as means of purging evil passions and egoism. Bad actions bring misery and rebirth, while good leads to happiness and salvation. Sikhism firmly believes in *karma* professing 'As one sows, so one reaps'.

The performance of righteous actions, repeating God's name (*naama smaran*), and hymns and praises to God (*bhajan* and *kirtan*) are the means to liberation. It is opposed to pilgrimage, idolatry and other extraneous practices,

God is regarded as eternal, omnipotent, creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. Sikhism believes in *karma* and transmigration, but salvation is possible by God's grace and with the aid of the Guru, hence, loyalty to the Guru is overriding importance. The entire world is the product of the divine will or divine order (*hukum*). Moreover, God's act of continual creation shows his perpetual interest in it, it is God's garden where a human finds opportunity for right action and salvation, a world worth living in and not a place of hatred or defiance. Sikhism believes in life and consciousness to varying degrees



in all living beings; most developed form in humans. The imperfect human being suffers because of attachment to lust (*kaama*), anger (*krodh*), covetousness (*lobha*), attachment to worldly objects (*moha*), pride (*ahankaara*) and self-centredness (*manmukha*) through ignorance. One has to obey the Guru and act according to the teachings (become *gurumukha*), to be released from the present state of imperfection. In the absence of a true Guru, scripture (*Grantha Sahib*) is the real Guru; Sikhs worship it as representatives of God.

Sikhism practises religious discipline in the form of repetition of God's name, devotional songs, a dedicated virtuous life, selfless service to the people and company of Guru *Mukha*, for the path of final release. It emphasises cultivation of the virtues of humility, love, contentment, truth, righteousness, mercy, compassion and purity, and preaches love to all without any distinction of caste or creed.



Though Sikhism in its essence is opposed to extrinsicality and rituals, over time rituals have been accepted, such as baptism, pilgrimage to Guru Gobind Singh's birthplace, and daily rituals. Guru Gobind Singh has laid down daily rituals such as: rising early, bathing in cold water, morning and evening prayers and meditation on God's name.

Gurudwara

The Sikh place of worship is the *Gurudwara* ('the doorway of the Guru'), a centre for worship, religious education, social activities and welfare services. Readings from the 'Granth Sahib', hymns and praises to God, meditation on God's name and reverence of the 'Granth Sahib' and Guru are the specific features of the Sikh worship. Some Sikhs may have a special room at home where the 'Granth Sahib' is displayed. It is customary to have a *langar* (communal meal) at Gurudwara where meat dishes, alcohol and smoking are prohibited.

Sikhism has no priests or monks and any adult can perform religious ceremonies.

On special occasions, continuous liturgical readings of the complete 'Granth Sahib' (*akhand paath*), a reading for the whole week (*saptah paath*) and the reading of extracts (*sahaj paath*) are relayed to the congregation. Sikh worship ends with the distribution of an edible gift



(*karah prasaada*) and a communal meal. There are many Gurudwaras in Britain.

Holy Days

Sikhs celebrate special days such as celebrations relating to the Gurus, Vaisakhi and Diwali.

Life Style

All Sikh men take the religious name Singh (lion) and all Sikh women have Kaur (princess), in order to promote equality and nullify caste.

Sub-sects

Sikhism, however, does have a number of sub-sects such as:

Namadhari

puritan Sikhs, who observe daily rituals strictly and abstain from smoking and drinking and are largely vegetarians.

Akalis

a militant group within Sikhism, who subscribe to fundamental principles, but are prepared to protect their faith by political or military means if necessary.

Nirankaris

are a special group formed after Gurbachan Singh (Nirankari Baaba), who reject the declaration of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, that he was to be the last Guru. Gurubachan Singh argued that any deserving Sikh could become a Guru.

Nanak-panthi

they believe that the Guru's teachings are the only essential Sikh duty and nothing else is required.

Khalsa

In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh created a new order within the Sikh community, the Khalsa (pure), whose members were willing to arm and serve the faith militarily if required. As an act of moral and practical symbolism, spiritual importance and a sign of obedience to the will of God, they wear the 'Five Ks': have uncut hair (*kesh*), a comb (*kangha*), a sword (*kirpan*), a bracelet (*kara*) and shorts (*kaccha*). Men are also required to wear a turban.

Sikh society is patriarchal, however women are respected and their views are noted. Nowadays women have been given a greater role in the management of the households, businesses, society and the state. The marriages are usually arranged ones. Divorces are rare. After death the body is cremated as soon as possible.

Interfaith activities

Sikhs are active in interfaith movements and accept people from other faiths to be converted as a Sikh.

ZOROASTRIAN BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS



Origin

Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions, founded in Iran by Prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) between 1500 BCE to 600 BCE.

He proclaimed the worship of Ahura Mazda (The Wise Lord) as the source of truth, righteousness, order and justice (*asha*), and good mind (*vohu manah*). He called the people to observe the threefold ethic of good thoughts (*humata*) and good words (*hukhta*) and good deeds (*hvarstha*). It was the official religion of for nearly 1,000 years. From tenth century CE onwards, following the Arab conquest of Iran and religious persecution, many Zoroastrians migrated to India and established in Gujarat, where they were accorded religious and economic freedom by the local King. They became known as the Parsis and adopted India as their homeland. Zoroastrianism has about 190,000 followers worldwide and 5,000 in Britain.

Sects

The only surviving group following the Zoroastrian faith is Parsis, except for two historical sects of the Shahanshahis, named after the last Shahanshahian King of Persia (Yazdedegard), and the Kadmis, no other notable sects are found. Parsis observe New Year's Day as the Day of Yazdedegard.

Beliefs

Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion; believes in *Ahura Mazda* as their supreme *God*, who is compassionate, just, creator of the universe, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, unchanging and impossible for humans to conceive, and the source of all goodness and happiness. Zoroastrians believe that everything he created is pure and should be treated with love and respect. This includes the natural environment; hence Zoroastrians traditionally do not pollute the rivers, land or atmosphere.

Ahura Mazda is believed to express him in the form of two spirits, one of good (*Spenta Mainyu*) and the other of evil (*Angra Mainyu* or *Ahriman Satan*). Zoroastrians believe Ahura Mazda was aided by the seven guardian angels of his primary creations the sky, waters, earth, plants, cattle, humans and fire, in fashioning the world. These guardians are collectively known as the Bounteous Immortals (*Amesha Spentas*) and they form the ethical framework based on the attributes of Ahura Mazda.

Ahura Mazda has made the world with an ethical purpose, a stage of constant strife between the forces of good and evil, and the struggle will be unabated until the forces of good prevail over those of evil and darkness. This will happen one day. When this occurs, Ahura Mazda will



bring this world to an end and create a world, which will be free of suffering and evil. To facilitate this, humans have to assist Hm by exercising free moral choice and living a life of perfect righteousness and virtues such as truthfulness, chastity, charity and kindness.

Zoroastrians believe the soul (*uvan*), the immortal essence or directing principle enables humans to make the choice between the forces of good and of evil on the basis of wisdom, innate reason, intellect, will and consciousness.

Death is the negation of life and is a work of evil wreaking havoc and destruction upon Ahura Mazda's creations. It believes in a life after death strictly in accordance with the law of retribution heaven for people of righteous deeds and hell for those of evil deeds. However, damnation to hell is not eternal; the imperfect ones in hell will be cleansed before joining Ahura Mazda in heaven and but eventually all souls will join the blessed; the world will be perfect state and Ahura Mazda will become all-powerful, as the evil will have been made ineffective in this world by good deeds. Zoroastrianism promises an ultimate happy and good life to all. It is individuals who are responsible for moral evils; of course the evil spirit of Ahriman, and his demons seduce them. Zoroastrian beliefs can best be summed up by the maxim: Good thoughts, Good words, Good deeds.

Worship

Zoroastrian worship mainly consists of offering prayers to Ahura Mazda requesting him to guide the life of righteousness. The traditional Zoroastrian places of worship are fire temples in which sacred flame burns eternally in a consecrated chamber are called *agiyari*. The Fire is a symbol of divine purity, where sandalwood is offered to create the good attributes in life (fragrance of sandalwood symbolises good attributes). Priests tend these fires. The people visit these temples with sandalwood as offering to the sacred flames and receive cold ashes to apply their foreheads as sign of humility. Zoroastrians worship Ahura Mazda and venerate *Amesha Spentas* and *Yazatas* (venerable ones or mythical gods and goddesses) and not the fire.



Holy texts

The Zoroastrian book of the Scriptures is called *The Avesta*.; has two sections:

- ✦ The *Avesta* is the oldest and core part of the scriptures, which contains the *Gathas*. The *Gathas* are seventeen hymns thought to be composed by Zoroaster himself.
- ✦ The Younger *Avesta* - commentaries to the older *Avesta* written in later years. It also contains myths, stories and details of ritual observances.

Life Style

At the age of seven, Zoroastrians are given a *sudreh* (shirt) and *kusti* (cord) as part of an

initiation ceremony. These garments are considered sacred. They tie the *kusti* around the *sudreh* three times to remind themselves of 'Good Words, Good Thoughts, and Good Deeds'. From then on, Zoroastrians traditionally perform this ritual with prayers several times a day. A high priest (*Dastur*) or an authorised priest (*Mobed*) officiates at Zoroastrian ceremonies and may be helped by assistants (*Eryad Sahebs*) to the high priest. The priests wear masks over their faces so that their breath may not contaminate the sacred fire.

Family and community

Zoroastrianism is a home and community oriented religion. It supports marriage as contract and celebration. There is no tradition of monasticism or celibacy. Zoroaster himself was a family man and most worship happens in the family home.

Zoroastrianism is also about action. Zoroastrians work towards improving the local community and society in general. They tend to give generously to charities and are often behind educational and social initiatives. The Parsi community in India is particularly known for its industrious contributions to Indian society.

Man and God

Unlike some religions where man is God's child or servant, in Zoroastrianism man is considered more as God's helper. Through man's positive choices, evil will be eradicated and God's Paradise on Earth will be established.

Men and women, rich and poor, and young and old are all seen as equal. One only surpasses the other through their righteousness.

Zoroastrian weddings

The marriages usually happen within the community. The ceremony includes contract and celebration. Interfaith marriages are not encouraged.

Holy days, feasts and festivals

Festivals are a very prominent aspect of Zoroastrian worship and are closely linked with the prophet and the seasons such as *Noruz* (the Iranian New Year), *Khordad Sal* (*The birthday of Zoroaster*) and seven obligatory feasts. The prayers are conducted by prayers and will engage in ritual washing as part of the ceremony.

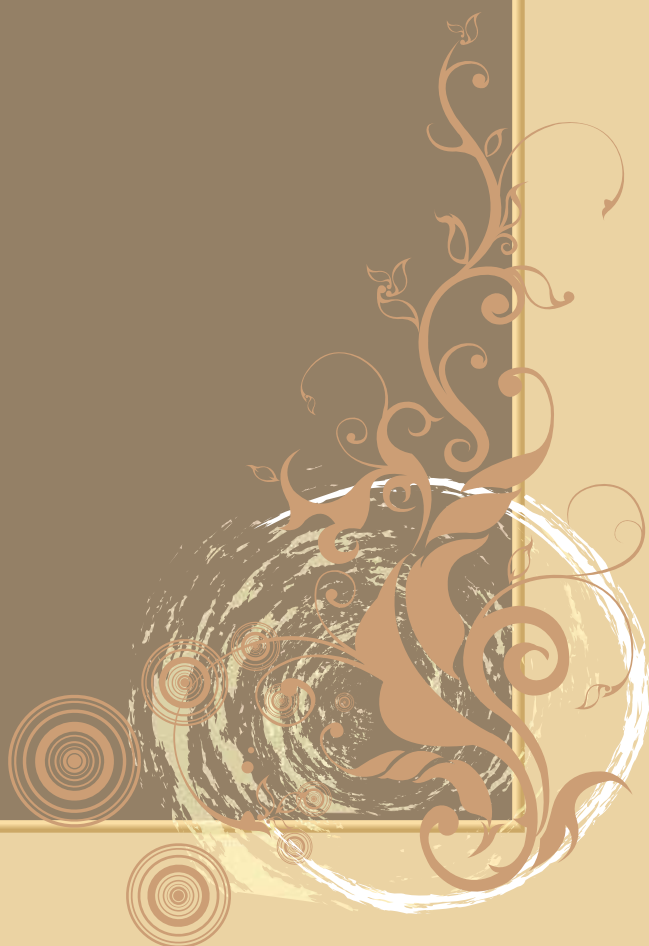
Zoroastrian funerals

Towers of Silence

Zoroastrians believe that as soon as the breath has left it, the body becomes impure. Death is considered to be the work of Angra Mainyu, the embodiment of all that is evil, whereas the earth and all that is beautiful is considered to be the pure work of God. Contaminating the elements (Earth, Air, Fire and Water) with decaying matter such as a corpse is considered sacrilege. Instead of burying the corpse, Zoroastrians traditionally laid it out on a purpose built tower (*dokhma* or 'Tower of Silence') to be exposed to the sun and eaten by birds of prey such as vultures.

CHAPTER 4

REFERENCES



In this chapter we have provided useful Web resources on wedding ceremonies and rituals, relationships (guidance for couples), financial matters, legal aspects, and contacts of helpful organisations and web references on the nine faiths. We hope these will be useful to the prospective marriage partners and their families.

Web resources:

1. Wedding ceremonies and rituals:

Baha'i

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/bahai/living/marriage_1.shtml

Buddhist

<http://weddings.iloveindia.com/buddhist-wedding/wedding-rituals.html>

Christian

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/ritesrituals/weddings_1.shtml

<http://www.yourchurchwedding.org/>

Hindu

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/ritesrituals/weddings.shtml>

Jain

<http://www.jaijinendra.net/index.php?page=shownews&newsid=4>

Jewish

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/rites/weddings_1.shtml

Muslim

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/ritesrituals/weddings_1.shtml

Sikh

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/ritesrituals/weddings.shtml>

Zoroastrian

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian/ritesrituals/weddings.shtml>

2. Relationships:

Guidance for couples:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/relationships/couples/>
<http://marriage.about.com/>
<http://relationshipcentral.org/>
<http://www.savemarriage.co.uk/>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interfaith_marriage
www.cofe.anglican.org/info/interfaith/ifmarriagehelp.doc
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_marriage

Why marry? :

http://www.bbc.co.uk/relationships/couples/life_why marry.shtml

Communication and conflict:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/relationships/couples/comm_index.shtml
<http://www.careforthe family.org.uk/article/?article=223>
<http://www.familydynamics.net/Communication.htm>

3. Financial:

http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/index/your_money/money_management_index_ew.htm
<http://www.independent.co.uk/money/spend-save/money-and-marriage-dont-let-financial-affairs-ruin-your-relationship-877729.html>
<http://www.equalityinmarriage.org/dmmon.html>

4. Legal:

http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/index/your_family/family/getting_married.htm
<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Registeringlifeevents/Marriagesandcivilpartnerships/index.htm>
<http://www.workpermit.com/uk/marriage.htm>
<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>
<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/when-things-go-wrong/forced-marriage>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage_law

5. Organisations:

Marriage help:

Aquila Care Trust

A charity that offers support and care to men and women who want to put their lives back together after a broken relationship or divorce.

Tel: 01892 665524

Website: www.aquilatrust.org

The Institute of Family Therapy

The largest family therapy organisation in the UK who offer clinical services for families and couples facing a wide range of relationship difficulties

Tel: 020 731 9150

Website: www.instituteoffamilytherapy.org.uk

Family Mediators' Association

A charity that supports couples who are considering separation or divorce by assisted to make arrangements, communicate better and to reduce the conflict between them to reach their own agreed joint decisions.

Tel: 0117 946 7062

Website: www.fmassoc.co.uk

Marriage Care

A nationwide helpline and relationship counselling service for people facing difficulty in their marriages, families or any close personal relationship.

Helpline 0845 660 6000 Mon-Fri 10am-4pm.

Website: www.marriagecare.org.uk

Married or not

A website providing information on the legal differences between married and unmarried couples

Website: www.marriedornot.org.uk

National Family Mediation Service

A network of more than 60 not-for-profit family mediation services in England and Wales, offering help to couples - married or unmarried - who're in the process of separation or divorce.

Tel: 0117 904 2825

Website: www.nfm.u-net.com

One Plus One

An independent research organisation whose role is to generate knowledge about marriage and relationships - how they work, why they sometimes run into difficulties and how couples cope when they do.

Tel: 020 7841 3660

Website: www.oneplusone.org.uk

National Family Mediation

Provides details of local mediation services to help couples resolve practical difficulties with minimum conflict

Tel: 0117 904 2825

Website: www.nfm.u-net.com

Parentline Plus

Provides a range of services to support parents throughout separation

Tel: 0808 800 2222

Website: www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Relate

The UK's largest and most experienced relationship counselling organisation, helping people work through their relationship difficulties and reach their own decisions about the best way forward.

Tel: 0300 100 1234

Website: www.relate.org.uk

Resolution

Offers details of solicitors who practise a constructive and conciliatory approach to the legalities

Tel: 01689 850227

Website: www.resolution.org.uk

Interfaith Marriage Network

Offers help and guidance for interfaith marriages.

<http://www.interfaithmarriage.org.uk/>

6. Further information on faiths:

BBC site which has information on all faiths:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/>

Baha'i

<http://www.bahai.org/>

<http://www.bahai-faith.org/>

<http://www.bahai.com/welcome.htm>

Buddhism

<http://buddhanet.net/>

<http://www.thebuddhistsociety.org/>

Christianity

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity>

Hinduism

<http://www.ochs.org.uk/>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism>

Islam

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam>

Jainism

<http://www.jainworld.com/>

<http://www.jainology.org/>

<http://www.learnjainism.org/>

Judaism

<http://www.jewfaq.org/index.htm>

Sikhism

<http://www.sikhs.org/>

<http://www.sikhnet.com/>

http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Main_Page

Zoroastrian

<http://www.avesta.org/avesta.html>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoroastrianism>

Books:

Marriage Customs and Ceremonies in World Religions (Paperback) by Arun S. Roy (Trafford Publishers 2005)

The Marriage Garden: Cultivating Your Relationship So It Grows and Flourishes By H. Wallace Goddard, James P. Marshall (Wiley Publishers 2010)



Jain Academy World Council of Jain Academies

Mission

Promotion of the academic education of the Jain Culture and Society, in both its traditional and contemporary aspects

Background and objectives

The dissemination of Jain values requires the study of Jainism at the academic level both for its traditional and contemporary aspects. This need brought the establishment of the Jain Academy (JA) in November 1991 and the Jain Academic Foundation of North America (JAFNA) in 1995. As the objectives of both these organisations were identical, it was decided to merge them to form the World Council of Jain Academies (WCJA) in January 1999. JA functions as the European HQ for the WCJA.

Activities

- Sponsored (1994-97) Jain course at the De Montfort University Leicester
- Established the Jain Academic Educational and Research Centre (1996- 2002) and the Chair in Jainology (2002) in the Department of Philosophy Mumbai University; it runs one-year certificate course, one-year diploma course and MA and PhD in Jainism. On an average about 200 students study Jainism every year at this Centre
- Sponsored (1999-2000) a course of Jainism at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University
- Guidance in the development of Jain teaching at the University of Wales, and at the University of Birmingham
- Established the Department of Jain Studies at the Faculty of Comparative Religions Antwerp, Belgium
- Supported the establishment of the International Summer School for Jain Studies since 2005. It provides comprehensive programme in India for the study of Jain Philosophy, History, Culture and Society in June and July

Structure and Vision

The temporary HQ of the WCJA is in London. The WCJA will have four zones: America, Europe, India, and other countries of the world. Each zone will be delegated responsibilities to look after the activities of the WCJA in their areas. It hopes to involve in variety of academic activities including annual lectureship at various universities, travelling scholarships for the students/scholars, conferences, training the teachers, publication of the books, a journal and establishment of Jain libraries at various universities.

The Jain Academy, Jain Centre, 64-68 Colindale Avenue, London NW9 5DR
Tel: 020 8200 0828 E-mail: info@jainnetwork.com or natubhaishah@aol.com



Dr Natubhai Shah

a medical graduate, has Ph D in Jain Religion. He teaches Jainism at the Faculty of Comparative Religions, Antwerp (Belgium) as visiting Professor and is an associate fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University.

He the author of Jainism

The World of Conquerors 2 volumes, has written sections of Jainism in the Readers Digest World Religions, in the Times Encyclopaedia of World Religions, and in the Philips Hand Book of World Religions. He writes articles and lectures regularly on subjects related to Jainism.

He is the President of the Jain Academy and Secretary General of World Council of Jain Academies, and has been the main force to develop Jain studies in some UK Universities and in the Mumbai University.

He was mainly responsible for creation of the beautiful Jain Centre in Leicester, which has become major tourist attraction for the city of Leicester and a place of pilgrimage for the Jains. Recently he has undertaken the massive project of developing a Jain Centre London in Colindale Avenue, London NW9 5DR. He holds many posts in Jain and Interfaith organisations in UK and is the current chairman of The Jain Network, The Jain Sangha of Europe, and The Ahimsa for Quality of Life, The Council of Dharmic Faiths and other major interfaith bodies.

He is involved in the local, national and global interfaith work for many years and represents the Jainism at the highest level. The Queen invited him at Buckingham Palace for a private luncheon in 2000. He was chosen the 'Man of the Year' by the American Biographical Institute in 1991.

In 2001, he was awarded the highest Jain award the 'JAIN RATNA' for his outstanding contribution for the promotion of Jainism by the Prime Minister of India at a premier function organised to celebrate the 2600th birth anniversary of Bhagwan Mahavira at Mumbai.





This publication gives informed and contextualized information about marriage beliefs and customs in nine major world faiths, namely *Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islam, Jain, Jewish, Sikh and Zoroastrian*, currently practised in Britain. The faiths are complex, dynamic and contain great diversity and traditions. All the faiths, their wedding ceremonies and rituals described in this book have a great variety of different ways of expressing their traditions.

Every marriage is unique and the rituals associated with marriages vary throughout the world and within individual religious traditions. Some marriages will involve the couple and a few witnesses others may include whole communities with hundreds of guests. However, at the heart of all marriages are the promises that each of the partners make to each other publicly. Marriages are often known for their opulence and vibrancy but in reality this is only the outward sign and underneath the outward gloss and glamour of the wedding ceremony are lifelong promises and commitments.

For many people throughout the world, the aim of their lives is to have a happy marriage and to bring their children up to be responsible adults. According to insurance statistics, married people of all ages have a greater life expectancy than single people. Marriage is also vital for the emotional development of our children and deeply embedded in the fabric of human society after thousands of years of experience.

The information given in this booklet will not only be of use to prospective couples and their families, but also be valuable to schools, social services, local authorities and faith communities



Price: £5.00