

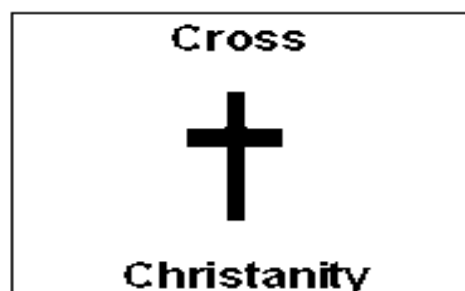
# Everyone Managing... Religion in the Workplace



Version 1

Owner: Diversity and Inclusion  
Approved by: Loraine Martins

Date issued 16-04-2014



**A Brief Guide for Managers**

## 1. Introduction

For many of our staff religious belief is a core part of their identity. Having an understanding of these religions, faiths or beliefs as line managers will help us be safer, more inclusive and provide the right support to our staff so that they can perform at their best.

This guide gives a brief description of the six major religions and belief systems which are most often encountered in our workplaces. It provides some information on the considerations we can make, such as the need for time-off to mark holy days and festivals; prayer times; dress codes and customs for food and drink.

Individuals may incorporate none, some, or all of the aspects of their religion in their lives, and while this guide provides useful pointers, managers are encouraged to discuss issues of religion with individual staff members. This will help us to understand whether and how their religion or belief impacts on their work.

Remember, there are many other religions and beliefs followed by our employees e.g. Humanism, Paganism, and Rastafarianism which may need special provisions or considerations. Further guidance is available on these from a variety of [sources](#) and from the [diversity and inclusion team](#).

## 2. Brief Overview of Six Religions

### 2a) Buddhism

Buddhism is a 2,500 year old tradition that focuses on personal spiritual development. Buddhists strive for a deep insight into the true nature of life and do not worship gods or deities. There are 376 million followers worldwide and over 150,000 Buddhists in Britain.

#### **Prayer times and requirements**

Buddhists can meditate and chant both at home or at a temple. It is not considered essential to go to a temple to worship with others.

#### **Dress codes**

There are no particular rules about dress.

#### **Food and drink**

The principle of non-harm means that many Buddhists are vegetarian, however, this is by no means universal. Similarly, while many Buddhists abstain from alcohol, others may not.

## 2b) Christianity

Christianity has about 2.1 billion followers worldwide. Its followers believe in the Holy Trinity as one God, and that Jesus Christ was one of the Holy Trinity who became man and lived on earth 2,000 years ago. In the UK, 42 million people see themselves as nominally Christian, and there are 6 million people who are actively practising.

### **Prayer times and requirements**

While worship is often thought of as only taking place at services when Christians come together, individuals may worship God on their own and in any place. There are no specific times or physical requirements for Christians to worship.

### **Dress codes**

There are no particular dress codes for Christians. Some Christians choose to wear the cross which symbolizes the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and is a sign of their faith.

### **Food and drink**

Most Christians eat all foods. Several Christian denominations practise fasting and prayer at various points throughout the year, especially before Christmas and Easter. Alcohol isn't allowed in Methodist Church buildings however, many Methodist members consider drinking alcohol a matter of personal morality.

## 2c) Hinduism

Hinduism is the religion of the majority of people in India and Nepal. It also exists among significant populations outside of the sub continent, with over 900 million Hindus worldwide and approximately 560,000 Hindus in the UK. In some ways Hinduism is the oldest living religion in the world, as elements within it stretch back many thousands of years.

### **Prayer times and requirements**

Hindu worship or Puja, involves images (Murtis), prayers (Mantras) and diagrams of the universe (Yantras). Central to Hindu worship is the image, or icon, which can be worshipped either at home or in the temple. The majority of Hindu homes have a shrine where offerings are made and prayers are said. A shrine can be anything: a room, a small altar or simply pictures or statues of the deity.

### **Dress codes**

Women will often adorn themselves with a red spot (Bindi) on the forehead to denote their faith. Married Hindu women usually wear black beads, or a specially consecrated gold chain (Mangalsutra) round their necks and will not remove this. A minority of Hindu men wear a small ponytail in their hair (Shikha) and orthodox Hindu men usually have a religious marking (Tilak) on their foreheads.

## **Food and drink**

Hindus do not eat beef and many are vegetarian. Some Hindus may require special consideration at times of ritual fasting on certain days like Janmashtami or Ram Navami.

## **2d) Islam**

Islam began in Mecca, Arabia over 1400 years ago and was revealed to humanity by the Prophet Muhammad. Those who follow Islam are called Muslims and they believe that there is only one God – Allah (the Arabic word for God). Islam is the second largest religion in the world with over 1 billion followers and approximately 1,600,000 Muslims in the UK.

### **Prayer times and requirements**

Practicing Muslims will undertake the 5 obligatory prayers at set times each day: between dawn and sunrise; around lunch time, the late part of the afternoon; just after sunset; and at night. The one other obligatory prayer for men is the Friday lunch time prayers which are undertaken in a prayer hall, where a sermon is given by a religious leader (Imam). It is not obligatory for women to pray in congregation or attend the Friday lunch time prayers, however, they may do either so if they wish.

Prior to prayer Muslims need to be clean and so are required to wash their faces, head, arms and feet (Ablution). The location for prayers must be clean, quiet and the prayers will be done facing the direction of Mecca.

### **Dress codes**

Hijab: The most visible form of Hijab is the head covering that many Muslim women wear. Hijab is an Arabic word meaning barrier or partition. It represents the principle of modesty and includes behaviour as well as dress codes for men and women. Hijab goes beyond the head scarf. It can refer to the complete covering of the body, except the hands, face and feet, in long, loose and non see-through garments. Muslim women are required to observe the Hijab in front of any man whom they could theoretically marry. This can also mean that practicing Muslim women will refrain from shaking hands with men. Hijab does not need to be worn in front of other Muslim women, and there is debate about what can be revealed to non-Muslim women. Niqab: is the term used to refer to the piece of cloth which covers the face and women who wear it usually cover their hands too. Although the majority of scholars agree that Hijab is obligatory, only a minority of them say that the Niqab is compulsory.

Men are required to keep covered between their naval and knees as a minimum. Some men will grow a beard and may also wear small coverings on their heads.

### **Food and drink**

Islam lays down what food is permissible (Halal) and prohibited (Haraam). There are some similarities between the dietary laws observed by Muslims and Jewish people, for example the prohibition of the consumption of pork and all pig products. The consumption of alcohol and other stimulants is prohibited for Muslims. Muslims may also refrain from being in locations where alcohol is consumed.

Muslims fast (Sawm) during [Ramadan](#), the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. During the 29/30 days of Ramadan all adult Muslims must give up the following things during the hours of daylight: food or drink of any sort, smoking, including passive smoking, and sexual activity. During Ramadan many Muslims will try to eat a large meal called Suhur just before dawn. When daylight is over, most Muslims will break or open the fast with dates or water. The evening meals during Ramadan are occasions for family and community get-togethers.

## **2e) Judaism**

Judaism is one of the oldest religions and was founded over 3,500 years ago in the Middle East. Jews believe that God provided an ethical and moral framework to set an example of holiness and ethical behaviour to the world. There are approximately 13.1 million Jewish people worldwide and 267,000 people in the UK who have said that their religious identity is Jewish.

### **Prayer times and requirements**

Practicing Jews pray three times a day, morning, afternoon, and evening. The Jewish prayer book (Siddur) has special services set down for this. The synagogue is the Jewish place of worship, and it is also used as a place to study, and often as a community centre as well. In orthodox synagogues men and women sit separately, and married women cover their hair. In a progressive synagogue men and women can sit together. Traditional Jewish worship requires a Minyan (a quorum of ten adult males) to be present. Adult men (i.e. those over the age of 13) often wear a Tallit or prayer shawl for morning prayer.

### **Dress codes**

Clothing worn by Jews can vary according to which denomination of Judaism they adhere to. Most Jews will cover their heads when praying, attending the synagogue or at a religious event or festival.

Kippah: Orthodox Jewish men always cover their heads by wearing a skullcap. Progressive Jews see the covering of the head as optional. Women also cover their heads by wearing a scarf, a hat or in some cases a specially made wig.

### **Food and drink**

Practicing Jews will abide by the laws of Kashrut (keeping kosher), Progressive Jews will frequently do so out of cultural identification. The best known rule is that they should not eat certain types of meat such as pork, eating only meat or poultry that has been killed in the approved way, called Shechita.

## **2f) Sikhism**

Sikhism was founded in the Punjab by Guru Nanak in the 15th Century CE. Sikhs think religion should be practised by living in the world and coping with life's everyday problems. There are 20 million Sikhs worldwide, most of whom live in the Punjab province of India. Approximately 340,000 Sikhs are living in the UK.

### **Prayer times and requirements**

Sikh worship can be public or private and Sikhs can pray at any time and any place. The Sikh code of conduct lays down a clear discipline for the start of the day. Sikhs aim to get up early, bathe and then start the day by meditating on God. There are set prayers that a Sikh should recite in the morning, evening and before going to sleep.

Although Sikhs can worship individually, they see congregational worship as having its own special merits. Sikhs believe that God is visible in the Sikh congregation or Sangat, and that God is pleased by the act of serving the Sangat. Congregational Sikh worship takes place in a Gurdwara. Sikh public worship can be led by any Sikh, male or female, who is competent to do so.

### **Dress codes**

The five Ks are separate physical symbols worn by Sikhs who have been initiated into the Khalsa. They date from the creation of the Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. Each K has a particular significance and together symbolise that Sikh men and

women who wear them have dedicated themselves to a life of devotion and submission to the Guru.

The five Ks are:

1. Kesh (uncut hair)
2. Kara (a steel bracelet)
3. Kanga (a wooden comb)
4. Kaccha - also spelt Kachh, Kachera (cotton underwear)
5. Kirpan (steel sword)

Sikh men cover their heads at all times, normally by wearing a turban (Dastar), although a smaller headcovering (Patka) may at times be worn. The importance of the turban is recognised in the UK as Sikhs are exempted from legislation requiring certain protective headgear such as motorcycle crash helmets and hard hats.

The traditional dress of Sikh women is the Salwaar Kameez, a loose fitting top and bottoms, with a Chunni (a large rectangular piece of cloth) to cover the head and draped around the shoulders.

### **Food and drink**

Sikhism does not allow the consumption of alcohol and any other mind-altering substance. Many Sikhs are vegetarian and it is forbidden to eat meat which has been ritually slaughtered, such as Halal and Kosher.

## **3. Religious and Cultural Dates**

When a member of our staff observes a religion or belief, they may ask for time-off to attend religious ceremonies or mark holy days. Line managers should try to accommodate these requests wherever feasible. Doing so can increase employee engagement and in turn enhance safety and performance. Unless they have a clear business reason for saying no, managers are expected to respond positively.

If you refuse leave without a sound business rationale, be mindful that you could be at risk of indirectly discriminating against staff on the grounds of religion. Also, as a line manager you need to be aware that rules which prevent employees from taking all their leave in one go, have the potential to discriminate against staff who wish to go on a religious pilgrimage, so check with HR Direct before you make your decision.

The link below is the calendar of events for the six religions which will be updated every year.

[CALENDAR of RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL EVENTS](#)

Please note that the calendar is not definitive. The dates for the Jewish, Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist religious festivals are provisional and are determined by the actual sighting of the New Moon.

#### 4. Multi-Faith Facilities

Providing a multi-faith facility within the workplace is one way in which we can help to make everyone feel included at Network Rail.

There is evidence that meditation and contemplative forms of prayer have a range of measurable beneficial effects on health and well-being such as increasing the ability to focus and be attentive, helping staff to manage stress and helping to combat depression and boost creativity. As line managers, if we promote a healthier approach to work-life balance, this will help everyone to be more productive and profitable in the long run.

Multi-faith rooms are simple rooms with little furniture, at most a table, cupboard and a few folding chairs. They do not need to be costly and in some offices where demand for space is high, dual purpose rooms are possible. The space provided can be managed by the local facilities team together with a user group to ensure that use can be timetabled to avoid clashes with work and other users.

For more information about our work to create multi-faith facilities across the business please contact the [diversity and inclusion team](#).

#### 5. Bereavement

When a member of staff is bereaved, the actions and reactions of their manager are important and should balance compassion with professionalism.

The table below provides basic information on religious practices associated with death in the six main religions practiced in the UK, including mourning periods for which as an employer we may receive requests for compassionate leave.

Religion	Service will include...	Funeral customs	Mourning practices
<b>Buddhism</b>	Cremation, or burial in some traditions.	Usually a service within 3-7 days	Wide variation in practice.
<b>Christianity</b>	Either burial or cremation.	Wide variation in Practice. Services may be held in the home of the	There is no standard mourning period. A memorial or thanksgiving service



<b>Religion</b>	<b>Service will include...</b>	<b>Funeral customs</b>	<b>Mourning practices</b>
		deceased, a church or in a chapel at the cemetery or crematorium.	may be held some time after the funeral.
<b>Hinduism</b>	Cremation, as soon as possible after death, except for young children who are buried.	The service normally starts at home with a priest assisted by the chief mourner, often the eldest son. Mourners return to the deceased's house.	The traditional mourning period is 10-16 days, but this is often now shorter. Further rituals may occur at 1, 3 and 12 months
<b>Islam</b>	Burial, ideally within 24 hours of death.	Women may participate in the service but do not assist at the burial itself.	Friends and family feed the mourners for 3 days, after which period normal daily life resumes. However, unofficial mourning may extend for 40 days.
<b>Judaism</b>	Burial within three days of death, although some non-Orthodox communities permit cremation.	The service normally takes place at a Jewish burial ground, or in a synagogue.	Shiva, the main period of mourning takes place for up to 7 days. Further periods apply e.g. for up to a year in the case of the children of the deceased.
<b>Sikhism</b>	Cremation as soon as possible.	A short service at the home of the deceased, followed by a service at the temple, with further prayers at the crematorium.	Up to 10 days of readings from scriptures, attended by family and friends.

For more information about Diversity and Inclusion visit [Connect](#) or email the team on [diversityandinclusion@networkrail.co.uk](mailto:diversityandinclusion@networkrail.co.uk)