

HANDBOOK



# LIVING TOGETHER IN MALTA

Responding to Religious Diversity



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Responding to Religious Diversity



Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund  
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The handbook is part the Living Together Project which was part financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and conducted in collaboration with the Catholic Church's Inter-Religious Dialogue Commission and the Christians Together in Malta (Malta Ecumenical Council).

The Living Together Project was led by Prof. Adrian-Mario Gellel a member of the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Theology University of Malta, with the assistance of Dr Zoi Arvanitidou, Mr Julian Galea and Ms Christine Rossi.

Cover photo: *Mario Purisic*

Design: *Krysta Micallef* (xorxcreative.com)

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# INTRODUCTION

A diverse social landscape prompts people to do one of two things: either to erect barriers that create distrust, fearmongering and misinformation-driven xenophobia, or to embrace new opportunities for the creation of a better society.

The rapidly changing composition of Maltese society has increased the necessity for the dissemination of correct information about the different worldviews present in our society and for the training of professionals so that they can overcome cultural barriers when interacting with their clients, students or patients having different faiths and cultures.

This handbook aims at dispelling myths, encouraging safe and productive intercultural and interreligious dialogue, building bridges between communities and institutions and strengthening social solidarity by fostering empathy and understanding.

# THE PROJECT

The handbook is part the Living Together Project which was part financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and conducted in collaboration with the Catholic Church's Inter-Religious Dialogue Commission and the Christians Together in Malta (Malta Ecumenical Council).

Besides publishing a handbook, this two-year project also provided a series of educational training sessions for professionals in the Education, Health and Social Work sectors, developed a website ([www.livingtogether.mt](http://www.livingtogether.mt)), published eight short videos on various religious communities present in Malta (also available on the website) and conducted research among professionals and among third country nationals.



# HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is intended for the use of professionals, individuals and institutions who may come into contact with people of different faiths, beliefs and religious/cultural backgrounds. Though far from comprehensive, it provides a brief introduction to eleven religious groups found around the Maltese islands, as well as contact details for the religious leaders or administrators of each faith community.

This is followed by a ‘most essential’ Question and Answer section that deals with the most immediate issues, such as prayer, etiquette and dietary requirements.

A more comprehensive information on each faith community and an extensive Q&A section is provided in the project’s website ([livingtogether.mt](http://livingtogether.mt)). In some cases, a ‘Toolkit’ is provided. This presents rudimentary spiritual resources, such as obligatory prayers and religious imagery. While many of these resources can be easily accessed online, they are provided here for ease of reference or in case internet access is somehow limited or impossible.



The answers in this book will not provide you with hard and fast answers. When dealing with unfamiliar cultural or religious groups it is easy to view the members of these groups as one homogenous group. However, it is important to understand that there are differences within the same religious group in terms of culture, beliefs and practices. The answers provided in this handbook are only intended as guidelines that may help you when encountering persons of different faiths.

If a situation arises that is not covered by this handbook or the relevant online resources, it has been our experience when working on this project that, if approached respectfully and openly, many people are happy to explain the requirements and particularities of their faith tradition.



## NOTA BENE

This handbook does not give an exhaustive overview of all religious communities present in Malta. There are various small faith communities for which no information was found or which was difficult to obtain. We hope that this handbook is a first step towards giving a clearer picture of the rich and diverse religious scenario present in the Maltese Islands.





BAJA' FATH



# INTRODUCTION

**'True religion is the source of love and agreement amongst men, the cause of the development of praiseworthy qualities; but the people are holding to the counterfeit and imitation, negligent of the reality which unifies; so they are bereft and deprived of the radiance of religion.'**

*'Abdu'l-Bahá,  
Foundations of World Unity*

The Bahá'í Faith was founded in 1844 in Shiráz, Persia (now Iran). The Bahá'í Faith emphasizes the spiritual unity of mankind demonstrated through three core principles: the unity of God, the unity of religion and the unity of humanity.

Bahá'ís believe that God grants man the gift of divine revelation through His Manifestations (often identified as 'Prophets' or 'Messengers' in other traditions); personages capable of fully reflecting the divine attributes of God in this physical world. These Manifestations bring the teaching and instruction necessary for humanity to fulfil its divinely instated purpose, that of moving towards knowing and loving God.

There are currently between 6 and 7 million Bahá'ís around the world across over 200 countries. In Iran, where the Bahá'í Faith originated, there are now about 300,000 Bahá'ís, constituting the largest religious minority in that country.





## MAIN FESTIVALS

Celebration dates are tied to the Baha'i calendar, which begins on the Spring Equinox, and thus varies occasionally in its alignment with the Gregorian calendar, hence the two dates given.

- **Naw-Rúz**

Celebrated on the Spring Equinox, 20 / 21<sup>st</sup> of March

- **Twin Holy Birthdays**

Celebration rotates each year based on the lunar calendar, but is celebrated at a point between 14<sup>th</sup> October and 13<sup>th</sup> November each year

- **Festival of Ridván**

A twelve day festival, of which the 1<sup>st</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> days are especially commemorated. Starts on the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> of April

- **Declaration of the Báb**

22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> May

- **Martyrdom of the Báb**

July 9 or July 10

- **Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh**

27<sup>th</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup> May

## PRESENCE IN MALTA

The first Bahá'í pioneer to visit Malta was Ms. Una Townshend-Dean in October 1953. The first local declarations to the Faith took place in 1972, as did the first Bahá'í wedding in the country. The first Spiritual Assembly of Malta was elected in 1973.

The community currently has one Administrative Committee and one Spiritual Assembly. The Bahá'í Community of Malta hosts believers of diverse backgrounds. Past and present members include people of Maltese, Italian, Persian, French, American, Latvian, Hungarian, Irish, British and Brazilian background.

Bahá'ís in Malta often meet in their homes to pray together and celebrate Holy Days. For larger events, diverse venues around Malta and Gozo are rented for the occasion.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Concerning the Baha'i Faith

## SACRED SPACES, AND PRACTICES

### **In the Baha'i Faith how do you address a priest?**

There is no clergy within the Baha'i Faith. Every year, within every local community, a Local Spiritual Assembly of 9 people is elected by silent, anonymous ballot and without campaigning or electioneering, to serve the community and tend to its needs. These representatives of the Local Spiritual Assemblies do not hold any particular honorifics or titles and can be addressed normally.

### **Do Baha'i women cover their head?**

Female Bahá'ís do not need to wear headgear. They can wear it if they visit a place, an area or another country where the covering of a woman's head is mandatory.

## PRAYER

### **What do Baha'is need in order to pray?**

Before reciting their Obligatory Prayers, Baha'is should perform ritual ablutions (washing of the face and hands). When they recite their Obligatory Prayers, Baha'is should face the Shrine of



Baha'u'llah, in Bahji, Israel. Baha'is are forbidden from performing their Obligatory Prayers in a congregation, preferring a quiet, private and serene environment instead to do so.

**Where can Baha'is pray?**

Bahá'ís can pray in all clean, respectful environments. They have no problem praying in a temple or building that belongs to another faith group. When they pray, you should not disturb them or speak to them. You should be respectful, and you should wait until they finish their prayer.

**At what times do Baha'is pray?**

Baha'is over the age of 15 must recite one of three Obligatory prayers daily. A Baha'i may choose which one to recite, and is not bound to recite the same one every day. When reciting their Obligatory Prayer, Baha'is must face the Qiblih, which is the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Bahji, Israel. Baha'is also recite the Greatest Name (Alláh-u-Abhá) 95 times each day. Baha'is under the age of 15, over the age of 70 and in ill health are all exempt from reciting the Obligatory prayer, as are women who are menstruating. Baha'is may also gather to pray together in devotional meetings, which are usually open to people of all faiths and backgrounds.

**Towards which direction do Bahá'ís pray?**

During ordinary prayer, there is no requirement to maintain a particular facing, and Bahá'ís may pray facing any direction. When reciting their Obligatory Prayer, Baha'is must face the Qiblih, which is the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Bahji, Israel.



## DEATH AND DYING

### **Are any prayers said in the Baha'i Faith for a dying person?**

A near-death Bahá'í does not need a religious caregiver's intervention, but they will want their family members and their loved ones around them. There is no ritual or prayer related to those who are near-death.

### **Where are Baha'is in Malta buried?**

Baha'is in Malta are buried in private graves. In the event of the death of a Baha'i, contact should be made with the family and the National Baha'i Institution who will coordinate things accordingly.

### **When is a Baha'i funeral normally held?**

A Bahá'í funeral should take place soon after the death (the ideal is 24 hours after death) and the memorial services usually take place within two or three days of death. According to Bahá'í precepts, the body should be buried within one hour's travel from the location of the death (the means of travel is not specified). Bahá'í funeral law does not require that the deceased's body be embalmed, except if the local/state law requires it.

### **Is cremation acceptable in the Baha'i Faith?**

Cremation is forbidden in the Baha'i Faith.

## SACRED FOOD/DIETARY ISSUES

### **Which foods are prohibited in the Baha'i Faith?**

There are no prohibitions on food in the Baha'i Faith, save the prohibition on the consumption of alcohol. Food preferences are determined by local diet and/or personal taste.

**When do members of the Baha'i community fast?**

The Baha'i period of fasting is the Baha'i month of `Ala', which falls around March 1/2 to March 19/20. During this time, Baha'is abstain from all food and drink between sunrise and sunset, breaking the fast each day with the recitation of a prayer, often done as a family or in groups. A Bahá'í starts fasting at the age of maturity, which is the age of fifteen (15) and they fast until the age of seventy (70). Baha'is are exempt from fasting if they are ill, pregnant, nursing, performing heavy manual labour, travelling for extended periods of time or declared medically unfit to fast.



## Religious Resources for The Bahá'í Faith

The Baha'i Obligatory Prayers are provided here should they be needed by a Bahá'í patient or client who does not have access to a prayer book. Many other prayers are available online or through diverse mobile apps but as these are needed on a daily basis, it was thought prudent to include them here.

When saying their Obligatory prayer, Baha'is must face the Qiblih, which is the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Bahji, Israel. The location of the Qiblih from Malta is DUE EAST. This can be determined via use of a navigational compass or an app such as Google Maps; alternatively, a website such as <https://qiblih.com/>.

### THE SHORT OBLIGATORY PRAYER

To be recited once in twenty-four hours, between noon and two hours before sunset.

*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 Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.*

Bahá'u'lláh

### A BAHÁ'Í PRAYER

*Is there any Remover of difficulties save God? Say:  
Praised be God! He is God! All are His servants,  
and all abide by His bidding!*

The Báb



BUDDHISM



# INTRODUCTION

The founder of Buddhism in this age and world is called Siddhartha Gautama, also known as Buddha Shakyamuni. The Buddha (the word Buddha means ‘the awakened one’) was born in circa 480 BCE in a kingdom near the Himalaya Mountains.

## THE TEACHING OF THE BUDDHA

The Buddha said: *“I teach suffering, its origin, cessation and path. That’s all I teach”*. The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism contain the essence of the Buddha’s teachings:

1. The truth of suffering.
2. The truth of the origin of suffering.
3. The truth of the cessation of suffering.
4. The truth of the path to the cessation of suffering.

The Buddha is often compared to a physician. In the first two Noble Truths he diagnosed the problem (suffering) and identified its cause. The third Noble Truth is the realisation that there is a cure. In the fourth Noble Truth, the Buddha prescribes the cure necessary to achieve release from suffering through the Eightfold Path. The tenets of the Eightfold Path guide the lives of Buddhists around the world.

- Right understanding.
- Right thought.
- Right speech.
- Right conduct.
- Right means of making a living.





- Right mental attitude or effort.
- Right mindfulness.
- Right meditation (Samadhi).

The Buddha teaches: *“To cease from evil, to do good, and to pacify our mind”*.

### MAIN FESTIVALS

The actual date of the celebration and importance of these festivals varies according to the Buddhist tradition or ethnic tradition. Most Buddhist communities make use of the lunar calendar to establish the festivals. There are two aspects to take into consideration regarding Buddhist festivals. There are various Buddhist festivals and we are here listing three main festivities.

- |                              |                                  |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • <b>Buddhist New Year</b>   | varies between January and April |
| • <b>Māgha Pūjā</b>          | third full moon of the year      |
| • <b>Vesak or Buddha Day</b> | first full moon in May           |



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Concerning the Buddhism

## SACRED SPACES AND PRACTICES

### **In Buddhism, how do you address a priest?**

In the Tibetan tradition, the form of address 'lama-la' is used generously with anybody wearing maroon robes. 'Rinpoche' is used for recognized reincarnations, otherwise known as 'tulku.' The wife of a lama or tulku is often addressed as 'Khandro'. 'Abbot' in Tibetan is 'Khenpo' so an abbot named Tashi, for example, would be 'Khenpo Tashi.' There is also, within Tibetan Buddhism, another tradition of 'yogis' sometimes referred to as 'Ngakpa' (m) or "Ngakmo" (f). 'Your eminence' or 'your holiness' is usually reserved for the heads of the traditions, e.g. the Dalai Lama.

## PRAYER

### **What do Buddhists need to pray?**

Buddhists like to have a quiet place to meditate or pray. They sometimes carry small wheel prayer devices, prayer beads, or a book with holy texts around with them.

**If a Buddhist is praying what is not appropriate for me to do?**

As with any other religions, a person who is praying should not be disturbed unnecessarily. Buddhist can pray anywhere but generally prefer to meditate/pray in a quiet environment.

**How do Buddhists pray?**

Buddhists do not pray to a Creator God, but have meditation practices that resemble prayer. There is no fixed time for meditation or prayer but regular meditation, which can be several times a week or daily. During meditation, or prayer, Buddhists may recite or chant certain words and sounds, called mantras, repeatedly. These meditations may be done in front of an image of the Buddha (sometimes appearing as praying to the Buddha). Forms of meditation/prayer vary depending on the Buddhist denomination/tradition concerned.

**DEATH AND DYING****Are any prayers said in Buddhism to a dying person?**

When a Buddhist person is approaching death, family and friends stay with him to make him feel calm and peaceful and accept the inevitable life cycle. A small statue of the Buddha may be placed at the dying person's head and protective verses may be chanted.

**Are there any special considerations that the medical staff should be aware of when a Buddhist patient is dying?**

Death for the Buddhist is natural and inevitable and therefore should be a smooth and peaceful process. It is the moment when the spirit moves on to the next life. It is not important for the Buddhist to prolong or extend life when death is imminent. Some



dying Buddhists may wish to lie on their right side, as this is the posture of the Reclining Buddha, so as to better contemplate him. Some individuals may want to have an image of the Buddha by their side. Buddhist dying patients may want to minimize drugs that cloud their mind and feel involved in all phases as part of their preparedness for death. A dying Buddhist would, ideally, be moved to a private area and his relatives be allowed to be near to meditate with him/her and radiate loving kindness that helps minimize his suffering, as well as to reassure him/her of the good karma he/she has accumulated.

In the event that a Buddhist asks for the following elements, they should be helped to sit in a meditation posture and have their teacher brought into their presence. Some may want to die with their head pointing west.

### **Who do I call when a Buddhist person dies?**

When a Buddhist dies, the medical staff should call his/her family members, if they were not already with him/her at the moment of passing away. They should also call the person's spiritual teacher.

### **Is cremation allowed in Buddhism?**

Most Buddhists prefer to be cremated rather than buried, as the Buddha himself was.

## **SACRED FOODS/ DIETARY ISSUES**

### **In Buddhism, is there a prayer before eating?**

"The Precious Buddha is the Supreme Teacher, The Precious Dharma is the Supreme Protection, The Precious Sangha is the Supreme Guide. To these three jewels, the objects of refuge, I make this offering of food."

**Is there any period during the year when Buddhists fast?**

Although not mandatory, in Buddhism fasting is considered as a good method for practising self-control. Buddhist monks do not normally eat solid food after noon. Many lay Buddhists take only one meal and abstain from taking solid food after noon on new and full moon days.

**Which food is allowed in Buddhism?**

There is no proscription on food of any kind in Buddhism, including meat. Those who choose a Buddhist life are expected to make wise decisions about what to eat and how to live. Buddhism's first moral precept is "Do not kill", and many Buddhists consider the killing of animals to be against this precept. For this reason, many Buddhists choose not to eat meat. However, not all Buddhist traditions require the followers to practise vegetarianism.

**Which drinks are allowed in Buddhism?**

The fifth precept of practicing Buddhists is "Do not take intoxicants", but the precept does not say that drinking alcohol is a sin. Some Buddhists choose to abstain from alcohol altogether; others accept that it may be taken in moderation as long as it does not lead to intoxication.

**FAMILY ISSUES****What is the position of Buddhism regarding adoption?**

Buddhists believe that adoption is a positive act as it involves giving love and care to another human being.

**What is the position of Buddhism regarding fostering?**

In Buddhism, there are no objections against fostering.

**What is the position of Buddhism regarding divorce?**

Buddhism considers marriage a secular issue and therefore has no restrictions on divorce. Generally, since Buddhism puts love and compassion at the centre of its teachings, it is generally agreed that if a husband and wife cannot live serenely together it is better for them to divorce rather than lead a miserable life full of anger and hatred.

**What is the position of Buddhism regarding polygamy?**

Buddhism considers marriage a secular issue and, as such, is silent on the issue of polygamy and monogamy.

## **Religious Resources for Buddhism**

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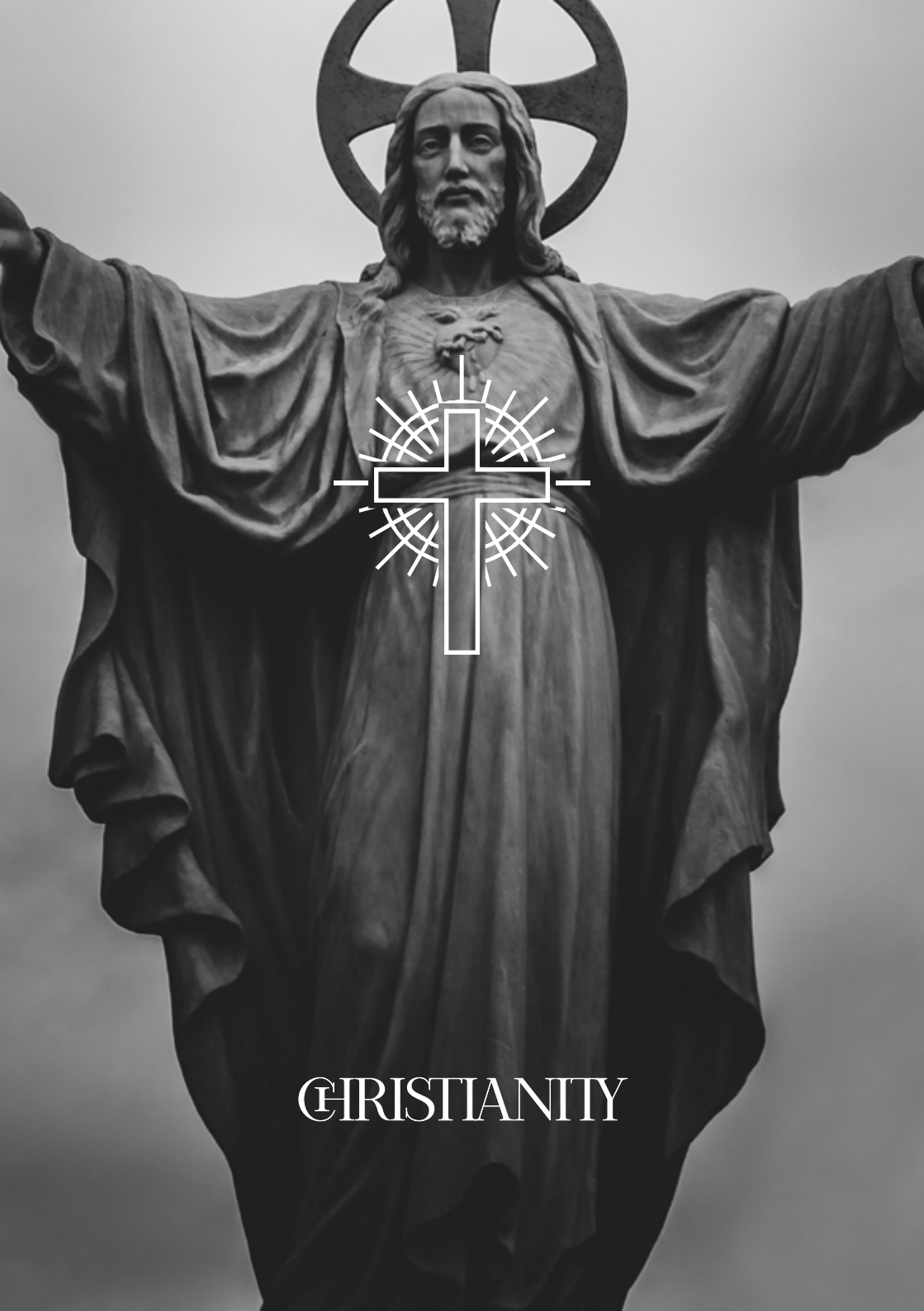
One of the main prayers:

*May all beings be happy and create the causes of happiness.*

*May they all be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.*

*May they never be without that sacred happiness which has no suffering.*

*May they attain universal impartial compassion beyond worldly bias towards friends or enemies.*



CHRISTIANITY



# INTRODUCTION

Christianity is the most widely practised religion in Malta.

It is a monotheistic religion which owes its roots to Judaism.

However, Christians believe in a God who is Lord and Creator of all living things, and who is adored as one Triune God in three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They also believe that God became man in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came to show God's love to humans to save them from their sins and to be a model of how they should live.

Christians believe that Jesus Christ was crucified and rose again from the dead, thus winning over death. This instils values of hope in life and belief in an afterlife. Christians meet weekly on a Sunday as a community to celebrate the Eucharist, to worship their God together and celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, other daily Masses are also held and personal prayer is always strongly encouraged, even if there is no fixed structure. Christians believe that the Word of God still speaks to them through the Bible. They hold that it is their mission to spread the Good News of Christ, which can also be done through many charitable acts of mercy.

Malta's largest faith community is the Roman Catholic Church. There is an estimate of about 30 other Christian communities largely falling into two other main categories: the Reformed and Protestant, and Orthodox ones.

This section will highlight the main differences between particular Christian communities who provided information to be included in the handbook.

## MAIN FESTIVALS

The dates for the festivals vary according to whether the Church follows the Gregorian or Julian calendar.





- **Christmas**

The Birth of Jesus Christ. 25 December or 7 January.

- **Easter**

The Resurrection of Christ from the dead.

The date of Easter varies from one year to another.

# COPTIC, ETHIOPIAN & ERITREAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS

## **Coptic Orthodox Church of Malta**

Coptic Christians are an ethnoreligious group native to North-East Africa, primarily concentrated in modern Egypt. Although most Copts live in Egypt, the Coptic Church has about a million members outside Egypt. In Malta, it is estimated that 200 persons meet regularly for liturgy every Sunday.

For these past fifteen years, the community has its own resident priest who has been sent by the Church of Egypt.

### **MAIN FESTIVITIES**

Besides Christmas (January 7) and Easter:

- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| • <b>Baptism of Jesus Christ</b> | January 19 <sup>th</sup> / 20 <sup>th</sup> |
| • <b>The Annunciation</b>        | April 7 <sup>th</sup>                       |
| • <b>Ascension</b>               | 40 days after Easter                        |
| • <b>Pentecost</b>               | 50 days after Easter                        |



## **Eritrean and Ethiopian Orthodox Church**

The Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches are in communion with each other, as well as the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria. In Malta, these communities are often found working closely together. Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Christians in Malta number around 1500. The Church counts among its members 20 cantors and 13 deacons and is currently led by the priest.

### **BASIC STRUCTURE AND DOCTRINAL TENETS**

The Holy Bible is at the basis of all doctrine of the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Church. Ethiopian and Eritrean Christians in Malta fall under the authority of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church based in Germany. According to the ecclesiastical order of the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Church, priests are allowed to marry. A priest may only have one wife.

### **BRIEF HISTORY OF PRESENCE IN MALTA**

The first Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Christians arrived in 2006. They were first housed in detention centres, camps and open centres. Liturgy was celebrated in houses. From 2007, with the help of the Migrants' Commission, Sunday liturgy has been celebrated at St James Church in Valletta by the Ethiopian Orthodox, whereas the Eritreans meet at St Mary Magdalen Church in Valletta.

### **MAIN FESTIVITIES**

Besides Christmas and Easter:

- **Baptism of Jesus Christ** January 19<sup>th</sup> / 20<sup>th</sup>
- **New Year** September 11<sup>th</sup> / 12<sup>th</sup>



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Concerning Coptic, Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Christians**

## **SACRED SPACES, PRACTICES AND WORSHIP**

### **How do you address a Coptic priest?**

A Coptic priest is addressed as “Father”, a deacon as “Deacon”, a bishop as “your Grace”.

### **How do you greet a Coptic person?**

A light handshake is common, but the female Copt should extend her hand first. If she does not offer to shake hands, the male should nod as a sign of acknowledgment. When meeting a group of Copts, greet the elders first out of regard and respect.

### **Do Coptic Christian women cover their heads?**

In Islamic countries, Copt females generally follow the tradition of covering the body in public, even though they sometimes wear western style clothing in cities. In rural regions, Copt females will wear black headscarves and lengthy, loose-fitting clothes that drape the whole body. Copt women cover their heads when in church and when they pray.

### **Are male Copts circumcised?**

Copts as well as Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Christians normally circumcise their male babies.



### **What is the position of the Coptic Church with regard to Female Genital mutilation?**

The Church is against Female Genital Mutilation but this is still widely practised in Ethiopia and Eritrea as well as by some Egyptian Copts.

## **PRAYER**

### **What do Coptic Christians need to pray?**

Copts do not require anything in particular to pray, except for a quiet place.

### **At what times do Coptic Christians pray?**

Copts celebrate the liturgy (Holy Mass), including Holy Communion in churches. Copts also pray in private, and prefer to set up a special prayer corner for prayer in their homes.

The Coptic orthodox prayer book of the hours called the 'Agpeya' includes seven prayers to be said at certain hours of the day: on rising, then at 9am and every 3 hours thereafter till midnight. Most Copts learn these prayers at a very early age.

## **DEATH AND DYING**

### **Are any prayers said in Coptic Christianity for a dying person?**

When a Copt is nearing death, a priest is called to administer the last rites. Relatives may be present and join in the prayers.

**Are there any special considerations that medical staff should be aware of when a Coptic patient is dying?**

When a Copt is nearing death, medical staff should, as much as possible, allow family members to stay with the patient. A priest is called to administer the last rites. The dying persons may feel the need to wear his/her baptismal cross during his/her last moments. Medical staff should not try to remove it.

**Who do I call when a Coptic Christian person dies?**

When a Copt is on the point of death or actually dies, the family should be informed immediately, and a Coptic priest called to administer the appropriate religious rites.

**Do Copts cremate their dead?**

The Coptic Church is against cremation, considering it as being against the teachings of Christianity. Burying and not cremating is considered respectful and in line with the Holy Scripture.

**SACRED FOOD AND DIETARY ISSUES****Which food is allowed in Coptic Christianity?**

There are no dietary restrictions imposed by the Coptic Church. During fast periods, they follow a vegan diet except during a few fasting periods, where fish is also eaten.

**Are Copts allowed to drink wine and alcoholic beverages?**

The Coptic Church frowns upon the consumption of alcoholic drinks and does not condone the consumption of alcohol. While having an occasional glass of wine is not considered a sin, this does not mean it is approved.

**Is there any period during the year when Coptic Christians fast?**

Fasting plays a key role in the Coptic Christian Church. Copts often fast between 180 and 210 days per year but will not make a show of it. It is considered a greater sin to advertise one's fasting than to not participate in the fast.

There are a number of periods when Copts are expected to fast, including, amongst others, the fasts of the Great Lent, the Holy week, of the Apostles (beginning on the Monday after Pentecost), of the Dormition of the Mother of God (between 7th and 22nd August), and the Wednesdays and Fridays weekly fasts. The intensity of the fasts varies between each. In general, Coptic fasting means adhering to a vegan diet, thus abstaining from meat, fish, eggs, dairy, and other animal products, although fish may be eaten in some of the fasting periods.

**Who is exempt from fasting?**

Children, the sick, pregnant and nursing women and the very old are exempt from strict fasting.

**FAMILY ISSUES****What is the position of Coptic Christianity regarding IVF?**

The Coptic Church does not object to the use of IVF for a married couple to have children, as long the egg and the sperm are taken from the married couple and the fertilised egg is transferred to the woman who gave the eggs for fertilisation. Fertilised eggs should not be destroyed. Artificial insemination by the husband's sperm is also accepted.

**What is the position of Coptic Christianity regarding adoption?**

The Coptic Church approves of Coptic married couples adopting children but does not approve of adoption by unmarried couples or single persons.

**What is the position of Coptic Christianity regarding fostering?**

Coptic Christians are open and positive towards fostering.

**What is the position of Coptic Christianity regarding divorce?**

Currently, Copts are allowed to divorce only if one of the partners has committed adultery. It may also be allowed if one of the partners converts to another religion.

**What is the position of Coptic Christianity regarding polygamy?**

Polygamy is not permitted in the Coptic Church. Coptic marriages are strictly monogamous.

## ORTHODOX CHURCHES

**Saint George of the Ecumenical  
Patriarchate of Constantinople**

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The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople incarnates and communicates the rich spiritual resources of Eastern Christianity.



## MAIN FESTIVITIES

Besides Christmas (25 December) and Easter:

• <b>Nativity of the Theotokos</b>	September 8
• <b>Exaltation of the Holy Cross</b>	September 14
• <b>Presentation of the Theotokos in the Temple</b>	November 21
• <b>Epiphany (Baptism of Christ)</b>	January 6
• <b>Presentation of Christ in the Temple</b>	February 2
• <b>Annunciation (Evangelismos)</b>	March 25
• <b>Ascension</b>	40 Days after Easter
• <b>Pentecost</b>	50 Days after Easter
• <b>Transfiguration of Christ</b>	August 6
• <b>Dormition of the Theotokos (Koimesis)</b>	August 15

## SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

Icons are of great significance for Orthodox Christians.

Orthodox Christians use icons as both a form of prayer and a means of worship.

Orthodox Christians perform the sign of the Holy Cross by placing together the first three fingers of the right hand and saying the words: “*In the name of the Father, of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen!*”.

In the majority of Orthodox churches, the altar or sanctuary is divided by a solid curtain (known as iconostasis) from the main body of the congregation entreated by three doors, the one in the middle being known as the Holy Door. Icons of the Christ and the Mother of God (Theotokos) decorate each side door of the Holy Door at the iconostasis.





## **HISTORY OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH IN MALTA**

In 1816, the Saint George Greek Orthodox Church was founded by Greeks living in Malta. The Saint George Greek Orthodox Church is under the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.

The Church is dedicated to Saint George and is located in Merchants Str, Valletta.

## **Romanian Orthodox Church**

The Romanian Orthodox Church is the community of Orthodox Christians, clergy, monks and laypeople inside and outside the frontiers of Romania.

The patron saint of the Romanian Orthodox Church is St Andrew the Apostle. His feast is celebrated on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November.

## **MAIN FESTIVITIES**

Besides Christmas (25 December) and Easter, the Romanian Orthodox Church celebrates the following feasts:

- **The Baptism of Jesus Christ**, 6 January.
- **Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday** and **Good Friday**.
- **The Assumption of Holy Mary**.
- Other holy days such as the feast of **St John the Baptist** (the patron saint of the parish in Malta), **Saints Peter and Paul**, the **Lent of the Assumption of the Holy Mary**, the **Lent of Christmas**.
- The beginning of the ecclesiastical year falls on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September.



## **SIGNS AND SYMBOLS**

The sign of the Holy Cross is performed by placing together the first three fingers of the right hand and proclaiming the words: “In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!”. Symbols include:

- Holy icons representing Holy Mary, the Holy Trinity, and our Saints.
- Frescoes or mosaics decorating the interior walls of churches which portray various scenes from Biblical accounts and the lives of the saints.
- Wooden iconostasis, the screen that separates the altar from the rest of the church.

## **STRUCTURES OF AUTHORITY**

The Birth of St John the Baptist Romanian Orthodox Church in Malta is organized as follows: Parish Priest – Parish Council – Secretary – Parishioners.

## **HISTORY OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN MALTA**

The Parish community dedicated to The Birth of St John the Baptist was legally established on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 2014 with the approval of P. S. Siluan, Bishop of Italy and Malta.

The church wherein the community worships is dedicated to St Rocco and is located in St Ursula Street, Valletta.

Church services do not cater only for the Romanian community, but also to the Moldavian one, which is showing signs of growth in Orthodox Christian life in Malta.



## **Serbian Orthodox Church**

The Parish of St. Apostle Paul and St. Nicholas has been officially present on the Maltese islands since the early 1990's. In the beginning it was part of the Diocese of Britain and Scandinavia and in 2014 it became part of the Diocese of Austria, Switzerland, Italy and Malta. In 2019 Fr. Risto Gorancic was appointed as Parish priest residing in Malta. The Parish, which is one of the largest orthodox communities, serves Serbian orthodox, as well as other orthodox nations which does not have their priests present in Malta.

Holy Liturgy is celebrated every Sunday and on the other Holy days, following the Liturgical year cycle. Friday's evening Akathist and vigils on the eve of the Holy days are held regularly. Currently all services are held in St. Nicholas church in Valletta. Holy Liturgy is also celebrated on the island of Gozo once a month. Akathist is served at St. Paul's bay and Birzebbuga on alternating weeks.

### **MAIN FESTIVITIES, CELEBRATIONS AND HOLY DAYS**

The Serbian Orthodox Church uses of the traditional Julian Calendar. Therefore Christmas Day (December 25th) falls on January the 7th of the Gregorian (world) Calendar. The date of Easter is calculated according to the original Nicean formula from 325 AD and therefore falls on a different date than for the Catholic Church.

The local parish feast is celebrated on the day of St. Peter and St. Paul on 12<sup>th</sup> of July of Gregorian (world) calendar. Beside Christmas and Easter, other big holy days are St. Lazar of Serbia (Vidovdan - Serbian national holiday) on 28<sup>th</sup> of June; St. Sava of Serbia on 27<sup>th</sup> of January, St. Basil of Ostrog on 13<sup>th</sup> of May and all the saint's days celebrated as Serbian "slava" – the family patrons and feast.



After each Holy Liturgy there is “Agape” – the feast of love – a common meal served to everyone: those who attend the service and those who just pass by and stop for a moment. Agape creates, widens and strengthens the bonds among community members, their guests, and the local community. For Agape everyone is welcome!

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Concerning Members of the Orthodox Church**

## **SACRED SPACES, PRACTICES AND WORSHIP**

### **Do Orthodox Christians have a birth ceremony?**

Orthodox Christians call a priest when a baby is born. The priest goes to the home or hospital to perform special prayers for the mother and the new-born. On the fortieth day after birth, the mother and baby are called to the church for a prayer service, called churching, that brings the family together and introduces the child into the community of the Orthodox Christian faith. This practice follows what must have occurred when Jesus was born, because, according to the ancient Jewish Rite, the mother and the child did not go outside the house during the first forty days after birth. This service for the new-born child lasts around ten minutes and is normally planned to be held either exactly forty days after the birth or on the first Sunday following the fortieth day.



## **PRAYER**

### **At what times do Orthodox Christians pray?**

Daily prayer is very important for Orthodox Christians. Three (3) types of prayer are mentioned in the traditional catechism of the Orthodox Church, a) for asking, b) for thanking, and c) for praising. Most of the times, for Orthodox Christians, prayer is an open dialogue with God. The Christian Orthodox Church has formal prayers according to the hours of the day and Orthodox Christians are encouraged to pray in the morning, evening and at mealtimes, as well as to have a short prayer that can be repeated in all circumstances throughout the day.

### **What do Orthodox Christians need to pray?**

Orthodox Christians need a quiet place to pray. They may also need Orthodox prayer beads or the Bible.

### **Are Orthodox Christian women required to cover their head?**

Some Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches require females to cover their heads but only while they are in a church. Otherwise, Orthodox Christian females are not expected to wear a veil to cover their heads.

## **DEATH AND DYING**

### **Who should I call when an Orthodox Christian person dies?**

When an Orthodox Christian dies, you should call his/her family members and a priest. A priest should be called when an Orthodox Christian approaches death, as the dying person may wish the priest to hear their final confession and administer Holy Communion. The priest will guide those present in prayers for the liberation of the soul after death.

**Who presides over the Orthodox Christian funeral service?**

The Orthodox priest presides over the funeral services.

**Will there be an open casket at the Orthodox Christian funeral?**

The casket is always open during the Orthodox funeral services in the church. According to tradition, the casket will face east with feet toward the altar and is always made of dark wood. If the deceased is a child, the casket is always white, representing innocence. A kolivian bowl (a boiled wheat dish with honey) with a lit candle on top is often placed next to the head of a dead person, symbolising the cyclical nature of life and the heavenly sweetness.

**Is cremation allowed in Orthodox Christianity?**

Cremation is forbidden in Orthodox Christianity. The Orthodox Church does not accept or acknowledge it as a means of disposal for the dead Christian Orthodox. Cremation, by the purposeful destruction of the body, is considered as a denial of the belief that the body is a temple of God. Orthodox Christians believe that their body is a gift from God, and that it should always be treated with dignity and respect.

**In Orthodox Christianity, how many days after the funeral does the mourner normally return to work?**

The burial is followed by an official mourning period of forty days for the immediate family. It is not advisable to take flowers or sweets to the family during this period. Usually, the bereaved does not return to work before a week from the funeral.

**Do Orthodox Christians hold memorial services after the death of a loved one? Do they commemorate death anniversaries?**

The priest and family members visit the grave on the third day after the relative's passing. Orthodox believe that the soul remains with the body for three days after the death of a person.



Next to the grave, the priest blesses and scatters in the wind a plate of boiled wheat called koliva. The plate on the tombstone is then ritually broken, symbolising the release of the soul from the body. After nine days, there is also a simple memorial service.

Another memorial service is held at the cemetery on the last Sunday of the forty-day mourning period, marking the soul's ascent to heaven. Friends and family gather for coffee, brandy, and cakes together with koliva mixed with parsley, nuts, pomegranate seeds, and sugar after this service. Each koliva dish ingredient has a symbolic meaning. Memorial services are held again after one, three and seven years. In order to celebrate certain milestones or when desired, the family may hold a Trisagion Service (three invocations: "Holy God, Holy One, Holy Immortal have mercy on us") beside the grave.

## **HEALTH**

### **What is the position of Orthodox Christianity on blood transfusion?**

Blood transfusion is allowed in Orthodox Christianity. There are no religious objections against it as it is considered in the same way as any other life-sustaining therapy.

## **SACRED FOOD/DIETARY RESTRICTIONS**

### **In Orthodox Christianity, is a prayer said before eating?**

In Orthodox Christianity there are short prayers (grace) which are said before and after meals. The most common grace prayers before a meal are:



*"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen"*

*"Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen."*

*"O Christ our God, bless the food, drink, and fellowship of Thy servants, for Thou art holy always, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen."*

And the most common prayers after a meal are:

*"Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen."*

*"Blessed is God, Who has fed and nourished us with His bountiful gifts by His grace and compassion always, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen."*

### **Is there any period during the year when Orthodox Christians fast?**

In Orthodox Christianity, there are four main periods of fasting:

- a) The Great Lent, which is six weeks. It starts on Ash Monday and finishes on Easter Day.
- b) The Nativity Fast which lasts forty days, from the 15th of November until the 24th of December, Christmas eve.
- c) The Fast of the Apostles, which begins on the Monday after All Saints (the second Monday after Pentecost) and lasts until the feast of St Peter and Paul (29th of June).
- d) The Dormition Fast, which lasts for two weeks. It begins on the 1st of August and lasts until the 15th of August (on the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos).





Also, there are some fasting days. These days are:

- a) The Eve of Theophany (on the 5th of January),
- b) The Beheading of St. John the Baptist (on the 29th of August),
- c) The Elevation of the Holy Cross (on the 14th of September),
- d) every Wednesday (except Fast Free Weeks) in memory of the betrayal of Christ by Judas Iscariot,
- e) Every Friday (except Fast Free Weeks) in memory of Christ's Crucifixion.

Orthodox Christians do not fast on and after certain feasts. During the days of fasting, the most stringent observance would be a twenty-four hour period without consuming meat, eggs, cheese, and even fish or alcohol. In less strict observance the fast can last until 3 pm during Wednesdays and Fridays or fasting only from meat and alcohol.

# PROTESTANT & REFORMED CHURCHES

## **Church of Scotland and Methodist Church**

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### **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

St. Andrew's Scots' Church is a unique local ecumenical partnership between the Church of Scotland and the Methodist Church of Great Britain.



Ministers come alternately from the Church of Scotland and the Methodist Church. Over twenty nationalities are present within the congregation, comprising many different Christian denominations. Services are open to all; they are in English and are celebrated in the Reformed tradition. Sunday worship is always followed by a time for fellowship, friendship and refreshment.

The church is committed to mission and social action and reaches out to vulnerable families, immigrants and refugees in Malta, and to HIV/AIDS communities in Zambia. It has developed an “International Centre” where English language classes are taught and from where a regulated non-profit financial institution wholly owned by the church called *Malta Microfinance* ([www.maltamicrofinance.org](http://www.maltamicrofinance.org)) is run. The church has also opened a foodbank.

### **SIGNS, SYMBOLS AND SACRED TEXTS**

The Empty Cross is the main symbol of the Christian faith in a risen Saviour. Bread and wine are used in the celebration of Holy Communion. Few other signs and symbols are used as the Methodist and Reformed traditions do not regularly use icons, statues, or other symbols. The only sacred text used is the Bible. The writings of many great theologians are valued, but only the Bible is held as sacred.

### **MAIN FESTIVITIES**

All major Christian festivals are celebrated: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, the Ascension, and Pentecost. There are various occasions when the Church joins ecumenical celebrations through *Christians Together in Malta*.



## **BRIEF HISTORY**

A Methodist Church has existed in Valletta since 1824, when Rev. John Keeling founded the first non-Roman Catholic Church in Malta. A Presbyterian church has existed on the current site since 1843 and the present building was completed in 1857 through the efforts of a Presbyterian minister, the Rev. George Wisely, during a time of strong British military presence.

The two congregations joined together in the 1970s after the Methodist building (situated next to the Argotti Gardens) was forced to close. The full story of the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches in Malta can be found by clicking here: <http://website.lineone.net/~peterbidmead/index.htm>

## **Evangelical Church of Germany Andreas Gemeinde**

The Andreas Gemeinde is a German Protestant overseas parish which is promoted by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) through the assignment of male or female pastors and other resources. The EKD consists of Lutheran, Reformation and United Churches. Therefore, the Andreas Congregation is open to all confessions incorporated in the EKD.

The Congregation defines itself as an “Ecumenical” parish. The only prerequisite for membership is baptism and admission to the Congregation is open to all baptized persons who are 16 years of age and reside in Malta.

## **SIGNS AND SYMBOLS**

The name *Andreas Gemeinde* derives from its closeness to St Andrew’s Scots’ Church, which was instrumental to the Congregation’s foundation in 1991 and with which it is associated.



The Church's symbol is the ship with the Maltese Cross symbolizing the salvation and protection that people experience in the church throughout their lives.

### **STRUCTURES OF AUTHORITY**

The Congregation is led by its Committee and its Pastor. The Assembly of the Congregation elects the Committee for a period of two years.

In Malta, the Andreas Gemeinde is closely linked with the German Speaking Catholic Congregation (St Barbara's Church, Valletta) and with St Andrew's Scots' Church. It is a member of the Chirstians Together in Malta (Malta Ecumenical Council). Through its commitment to the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) the Andreas Gemeinde is a member of the Council of European Churches (CEC).

### **MAIN FESTIVITIES**

Advent and Christmas:

- **Good Friday and Easter**

Sacred Music, Special Church Services, Easter Breakfast, participation in Procession and Church visits in Rabat

- **Pentecost**

Ecumenical Mass for Christian Unity (CTM)

### **BRIEF HISTORY**

The Andreas Gemeinde was founded in 1991 out of the Protestant St Andrew's Scots' Church as a German-speaking parish with the support of the German Embassy in Malta, the Protestant State Church of Bavaria and the EKD. In 2011 the twentieth anniversary of its establishment was celebrated with the participation of the Rev. Nikolaus Schneider, President of the



EKD Council. To date, this Congregation has had 16 male and female pastors from Germany. Since 2012 it has forged ties with the Protestant Lutheran Church in Italy, and since 2015 with the Johanniterorden in Germany.

### **SPECIFIC ISSUES**

- **Gender issues:**
  - Ordination of women. Women priests are office-holders, having equal rights to male pastors.
  - Blessing of same-sex partnerships.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Concerning Protestant and Reformed Churches**

### **SACRED SPACES, PRACTICES AND WORSHIP**

#### **Do Protestant women wear religious headgear?**

Female members of the Protestant Churches do not wear headgear inside or outside the church.



### **In the Protestant Church how do you address a priest?**

There are some differences to the priest's ministry through the Protestant faith groups. In Lutheran Protestantism you can address the Archbishops as *Most Reverend* or *Archbishop*, the Bishops as *Reverend Bishop* or *Right Reverend*, the Pastors as *Reverend*, or *Pastor*, the Deacons as *Deacon*, the Vicar as *Vicar*, and Seminarians as *Reverend Seminarian*. In Methodism Deacons, Ordained Elders and Licensed Priests are addressed as *Reverend*, Bishops as *Bishop* or *Your Grace*, and religious brothers and sisters as *Brother* (following his name), or *Sister* (following her name).

There may be differences depending on the denomination of the particular church. With respect to ecclesiastical address, most are called "Reverend", or "Pastor" as a title. When in doubt, ask politely and respectfully.

## **PRAYER**

### **How and where do Protestants pray?**

Protestants of the various groups can pray everywhere, in their home, at church, etc. When they pray, you should not disturb them or speak to them. You should be respectful, and you should wait until they finish their prayer.

### **What do Protestants need to pray?**

The majority of Protestants do not need something specific during their prayer. They need a quiet place, and some of them may carry the Bible or a copy of the Psalms, which they may incorporate into their prayer.



## DEATH AND DYING

### Who do I call when a Protestant person dies?

The priest/pastor can coordinate the funeral with the deceased's family and plan the funeral service.

### Are any prayers said in Protestantism to a dying person?

Every Protestant Church has a variety of different prayers, which can be said to a dying person. Some Methodist priests may choose the following prayer: *"Lord Jesus Christ, deliver your child from all evil and set him/her free from every bond; that he/she may rest with all your saints in the joy of your eternal home, for ever and ever. Amen"*.

Several Lutheran priests say the Lord's Prayer to a dying person. In the Baptist Church the dying person can say the following prayer from his/her heart: *"Dear God, I know I am a sinner and I deserve to go to Hell. Please come into my heart, forgive me of all my sins, and give me that gift of eternal life. Today, the best I know how, I trust You alone as my Saviour. Amen"*.

### Is cremation permitted in Protestantism?

While most Protestant faith groups do not forbid cremation, burial remains the most popular technique of securing the deceased's final rest location.

## SACRED FOOD/ DIETARY ISSUES

### In the Protestant Church is there a prayer before eating?

In Protestant Christianity, there are short prayers (graces) said before and after meals. The most common graces before the meal are: *"Be present at our table, Lord. Be here and everywhere*



*adored. Thy people bless, and grant that we may feast in paradise with thee”, “For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly Grateful/Thankful, Amen”, and “Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest, and let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen”.*

### **Is there any period during the year when Protestants fast?**

The various groups of Protestants fast at different periods of the year. Most Methodists fast on the first Friday after New Year’s Day, Lady Day (also known as the feast of the Annunciation), Midsummer Day, and after Michaelmas Day. Methodist priests usually fast on Wednesdays in memory of Christ’s betrayal and on Fridays in memory of His crucifixion and death. Good Friday is traditionally a fasting day for Methodists. During fasting days Methodists normally avoid eating meat.

### **Do Protestants have any dietary restrictions?**

In the majority of Protestant denominations, there are no dietary restrictions concerning food or drink, though members of a Baptist Church, among others, may avoid consuming alcohol.

## ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian church in Malta with 92% of the population claiming to be Catholic. The Catholic Church traces its origins back to the arrival of St. Paul on the islands in around 60 AD. The Maltese culture is strongly intertwined with the Catholic one, with the Church still bearing a strong voice in Maltese society.





## **MAIN FESTIVITIES IN MALTA**

Besides Christmas and Easter:

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| • <b>Feast of the Shipwreck of St Paul</b>                 | 10 February          |
| • <b>St Joseph</b>   | 19 March             |
| • <b>Pentecost</b>   | 50 days after Easter |
| • <b>Assumption of St Mary<br/>(known as Santa Marija)</b> | 15 August            |
| • <b>Nativity of Our Lady</b>                              | 8 September          |
| • <b>Immaculate Conception of Our Lady</b>                 | 8 September          |

## **Syro-Malabara and Syro-Malankara Catholic Churches**

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The Syro-Malabara and Syro-Malankara Catholic Churches are two Apostolic Churches that trace their origins to the work of St. Thomas the Apostle in Kerala, India. Each of the Churches is in communion with the Holy See in Rome.

The Syro-Malabara and Syro-Malankara community in Malta are all of Indian origin, and work in various sectors such as healthcare, retail and manual trades. There are no doctrinal or moral differences between members of these Churches and members of the Catholic Church, though differences of tradition and culture do exist. The liturgy of Syro-Malabara and Syro-Malankara Masses is conducted in Syriac, rather than Latin, English or Maltese and members of these Churches, originating from India, often observe an Indian diet, possibly being vegetarian.

There are approximately 2000 Syro-Malabara and Syro-Malankara community members combined residing in Malta.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Concerning Catholicism

### SACRED SPACES AND PRACTICES

#### **How do you address a Catholic priest?**

Generally, priests are celibate men who have dedicated their life to being ministers of the Church. You normally address them as 'Father', followed by their name or surname when formally addressed.

#### **Which is the greatest feast day for Catholics?**

Even though Christmas seems to be the most popular amongst the many feast days celebrated, the greatest feast day for Catholics is actually Easter, because it celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus from death and thus the victory over death and sin. Easter falls on the Sunday following the first full moon after March 21st.

#### **Why do Catholics have so many feast days for saints?**

Catholics venerate saints as humans who led a holy life. They are held as role models for believers. Catholics pray to saints to intercede for them in terms of God's help. In Malta and many Mediterranean countries, it is a tradition for each town or village to have their own patron saint. This creates the opportunity for big celebrations at least once a year. These feasts have



increasingly become more of a cultural tradition. However, within the Church's liturgical Calendar, Catholics pray to a specific saint nearly every day.

**Are saints like gods?**

No, saints are not gods. A saint is a person who is recognized as having had an exceptional degree of holiness or closeness to God. Thus, it is clear that Catholics revere one God and that Catholicism is not polytheistic.

**Is Mary, mother of Jesus, a goddess in Catholicism?**

No, Mary is not a goddess in Catholicism, but is revered since she was the Mother of Jesus Christ - God made man, thus Mary is the mother of God. She is believed to have been born and to have lived without sin. Mary was given by Jesus to humanity as the Mother of the Church and believers too.

**What is the role of Mary, Mother of Jesus?**

Mary is revered as the mother of God. She is considered to have been born and to have lived without sin. Mary was given by Jesus to humanity as the Mother of the Church and of all believers too. Thus, many Catholics have strong faith in Mary as their own spiritual mother, and pray to her for protection and for her intercession with God. Catholics also believe that there have been several Marian apparitions in various places throughout the world and many miracles have been obtained with her intercession.

**At what times do Catholics pray?**

Catholics do not have set times of prayer during the day. Practising Catholics meet in communities in churches to celebrate the Eucharist together every week on Sundays.



However, the Eucharist is celebrated every day too in churches, but there is no obligation for attendance on a daily basis. Some Catholics meet in groups or movements to pray or organise activities for their communities.

### **Why do Catholics pray with beads?**

Catholics recite the rosary using rosary beads. This is a prayer to the Mother of God, Mary. The prayer contemplates scenes from the life of Christ whilst reciting 5 decades of the prayer 'Hail Mary' each time followed by the Lord's Prayer and 'Glory Be'. The rosary beads are used as a help to keep count of the number of times the Hail Mary is recited. The prayer ends with a litany of praise to Mary, the Mother of God, praising her under different titles. Catholics tend to recite the rosary often and on different occasions.

### **What should I do if I happen to be in a meeting that starts off with a Catholic prayer time?**

Catholics are open to the presence of persons from other faiths or non-believers in their midst. If you happen to be in the midst of a gathering that starts off with prayer, respect the atmosphere of the place which might be solemn or quiet. Feel free to adopt any position which you feel comfortable in, even if it is not what the Catholic persons present are doing.

## **SACRED FOOD /DIETARY ISSUES**

### **Is there any food not allowed in Catholicism?**

No, there is no particular food which is not allowed in the Catholic religion except for the two days of abstinence from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

**Are there any drinks not allowed in Catholicism?**

No, there is no particular drink which is prohibited in the Catholic religion. However, it does advocate moderation, especially in terms of the consumption of alcohol, out of respect for one's own body and dignity.

**If invited to a Catholic dinner/lunch/feast is a prayer said before eating?**

If the hosts are practising Catholics it is customary for a dinner to start with a brief prayer which the persons present recite together before they start eating.

**Do Catholics fast?**

For Catholics, there is a distinction between fasting and abstinence. Fasting is the reduction of food, usually considered to be eating only the main meals and thus not between meals. Abstinence constitutes refraining from eating meat. Sometimes individuals might decide to fast from other foods as a sacrifice of their own account during Lent. Others choose to fast or abstain from meat on all Fridays. Fasting and abstinence is considered to be a form of penance and should be accompanied by spiritual fasting from sin.

The Catholic Church obliges Catholics to fast and abstain only on two days in the year: Ash Wednesday, marking the start of Lent, and Good Friday, the day on which Catholics commemorate Jesus's death. These fasting days are obligatory for adults between the ages of eighteen and sixty. Persons who are not in a position to fast due to health reasons are exempt. Abstinence is expected by all Catholics from children of over 14 years of age. Catholics also observe what is called the Eucharistic fast, which involves taking nothing but water or medicine into the body for 1 hour before receiving the Eucharist.

**Who is exempted from fasting during the Lent?**

There are only two obligatory days of fasting for Catholics during Lent: Ash Wednesday, which is the first day of Lent, and Good Friday, the day commemorating Christ's passion and death. Some Catholics maintain a fast from particular foods, such as sweets, as a form of penance and sacrifice. Children are invited to do some form of fasting that is meaningful to them. Only those between the age of 16 and 60 are obliged to fast on obligatory days. All Catholics, from the age of 14 years, are obliged to abstain from the consumption of meat.

**What is the Holy Communion celebration for Catholic children?**

The Holy Communion celebration is the celebration when Catholic children receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist for the first time. This means that they receive the host, which Catholics believe to be the real presence of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. From after this celebration, the children will be able to receive the Eucharist every day. In Malta children normally receive this Sacrament at 7 years of age. The First Holy Communion is usually celebrated during a mass within the parish or community that has been preparing the children for this day. The children wear white as a sign of purity and a reminder of the white gown given during Baptism.

**DEATH AND DYING****Are there any special considerations that medical staff should be aware of when a Catholic patient is on the point of death?**

Catholic patients who are very sick usually ask to be accompanied by a priest through the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. This sacred ritual is administered to bring about



spiritual and even physical strength during an illness. Those who are close to death normally receive the Last Rites. These are the main sacraments administered at the end of one's life to accompany one on the journey from life to eternity. These include the Sacrament of Penance (Confession), the Liturgy of Anointing, and Holy Communion.

### **How long is the ceremony of a Catholic funeral?**

A Catholic funeral normally starts with the transportation of the corpse of the deceased from the place where the deceased was resting, normally either the home or the hospital morgue, to the church where mass will be held. Only the closest family, together with a priest, accompany the hearse on its journey to the church. Once at the church, there is the usual mass, including a homily normally mentioning the centrality of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christian witness and responsibility and the deceased's good qualities and with a special rite at the end of the mass when prayers are said over the coffin.

The whole ceremony lasts about one hour. After mass, there is usually a very short time when the family is greeted and consoled by those gathered for the mass on the parvis of the church. The body is then taken for burial to a cemetery where final prayers are said before burial. Usually, the burial is attended only by the closest family and friends and is a very quiet, solemn moment.

### **Where are Catholics buried in Malta?**

Most villages in Malta have their cemetery, and many families have their own family grave. There is also the main national cemetery, the Addolorata Cemetery, in Paola. If families do not have their own graves there are common graves which can be used.

**Will there be an open casket at the Catholic funeral?**

Normally, the casket is kept closed during a Catholic funeral. Sometimes it is opened briefly only at the end of the funeral mass and/or before burial, for the family or friends to say one last goodbye. In the case of funerals of important figures for the country or the community, sometimes the body of the deceased is laid in a public place for the last respects of the community, a few days before the funeral ceremony is held.

**What should I wear if invited for a Catholic funeral?**

Generally, black, white or dark colours are worn to a funeral. Family members generally dress completely in black. Some may choose to continue wearing only black for some months. However, one must be aware when invited for a funeral that sometimes the family may make special requests, for example that participants wear white or not to wear black, especially when it is a funeral of a child or someone young.

**Does one send flowers for a Catholic funeral?**

It is customary for close family, friends or organisations related to the deceased to bring bouquets or rings of flowers to the Catholic funeral mass. Some families ask for donations to be given to a charity rather than being sent flowers. Usually, this request is made explicit in the obituary notice on the newspapers or radio announcements.

**Can I attend a burial ceremony for a Catholic?**

Everybody is welcome to attend the Catholic funeral mass. However, the burial ceremony held at the cemetery after mass is usually attended by the closest family and friends only. It is a very quiet and solemn ceremony.



**Is cremation allowed in the Catholic Church?**

Yes, cremation is allowed in the Catholic Church, but the ashes need to be buried in cemeteries or other sacred locations only that encourage the Catholic community to pray for and remember the dead. They cannot be scattered over the sea, air or ground, or kept in the home. This is founded on the Biblical belief which teaches respect for the human body, both in life and death.

**FAMILY ISSUES****What is the position of Catholicism on divorce and separation?**

Catholics believe that when a man and a woman marry, they commit themselves to each other for the rest of their lives. Their love is a sign of the permanent love of God towards humans. Thus, the bond of a Catholic marriage is indissoluble. Even if a civil divorce is obtained, it does not annul the sacramental marital bond. Thus, the Catholic Church does not allow persons to divorce. However, if there is proof enough that a marriage was not valid in a sacramental manner, then there is the possibility of a declaration of nullity.

The conditions for a marriage to be valid concern a person's freedom to marry, their readiness to make a marriage commitment, their understanding of – indeed their very capacity to understand and live out – what marriage involves, their openness to having children, the proper process for witnessing a marriage, and so on. The process whereby the validity or invalidity of a sacrament of marriage is investigated is a meticulous one and make take a few years before it is completed. It takes place in the Ecclesiastical courts, whereby the bond of marriage needs to be proved to have been null, i.e., never to have



existed. If the marriage is valid, but it is impossible for the spouses to live together any longer, there is the possibility of separation from the civil Courts of Justice. In separation, the marital bond is still there.

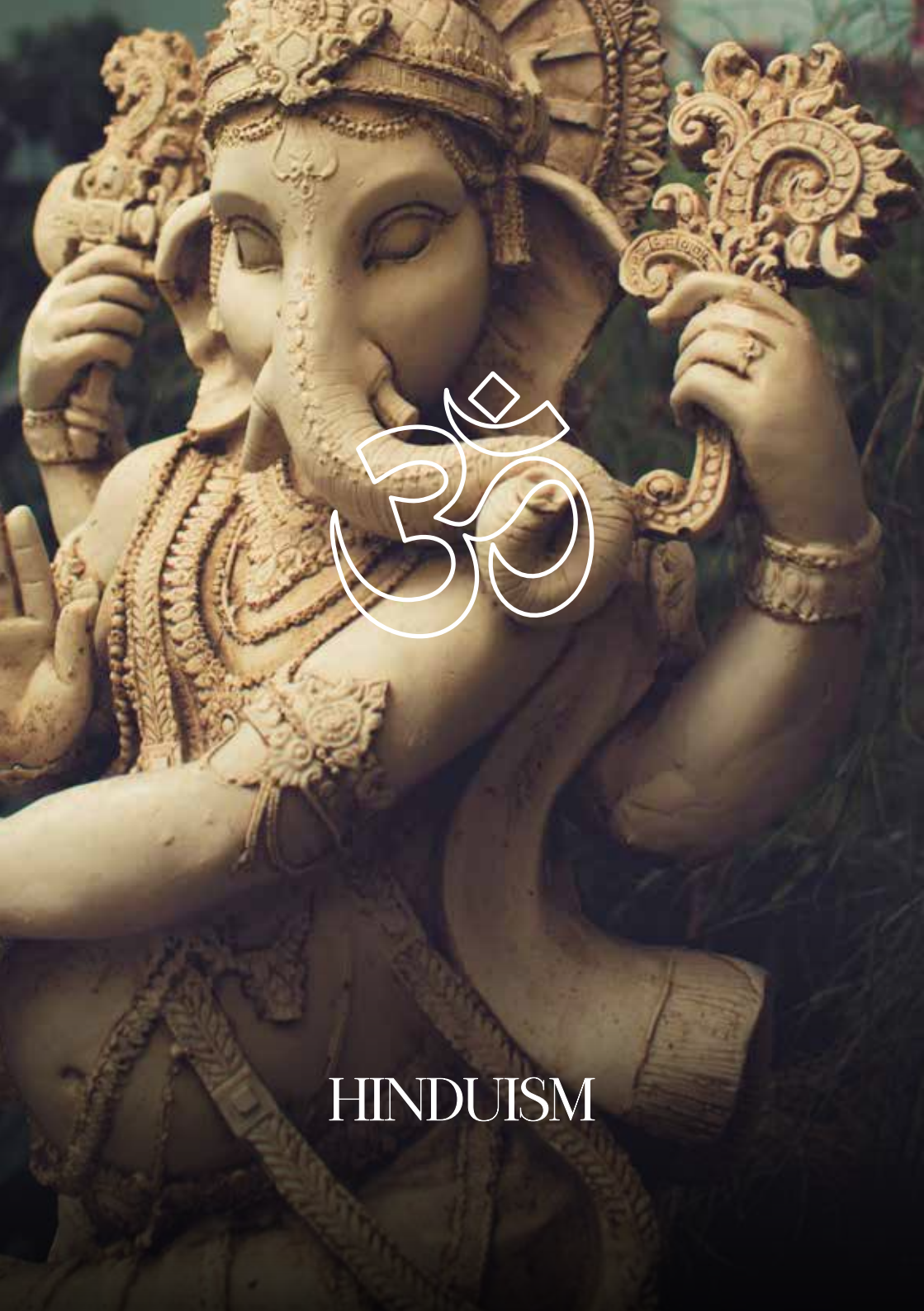
### **What is the position of Catholicism on polygamy?**

Catholics do not permit polygamy, because they consider marriage to be a permanent, lifelong covenant between a consenting man and woman.

### **Are male and female equal in Catholicism?**

In the Catholic religion, men and women are considered to be equal in dignity, whilst their differences are acknowledged. These differences lead to complementary roles and responsibilities in marriage, family life, religious leadership, and elsewhere. Some women do argue that they are considered to be inferior, especially since they are not allowed to the priesthood, a role which is biblically based on the figure of Jesus Christ.

However, even if women may be precluded from certain roles and ministries, they are held to be equal in moral value and of equal status. They are increasingly also being given more space in the hierarchy of the Church as they are entrusted with certain leadership roles which do require the exercise of the priesthood.



HINDUISM



# INTRODUCTION

The roots of Hindu culture can be traced back at least 5000 years ago to the general milieu of ancient Indian traditions and practices originating in the territory of present-day Pakistan and North Western India. Today there are roughly a billion or so Hindus world-wide.

The term Hinduism is derived from the word for India in Hindi. There are countless local cults and a great many traditions of worship and belief besides the six orthodox schools.

Hinduism recognizes no single founder and has no single authoritative book, though there is a canon of texts that are referred to throughout. Very little attention is paid to historical detail and its followers are always advised to place trust in the Eternal, the Absolute, called Brahman. As a consequence, there is no fixed code of beliefs. The philosophical-religious language used is Sanskrit.

## MAIN FESTIVALS

The major Indian festivals are:

- **Makar Sankranti and Pongal**  
a harvest festival on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January and marks the arrival of Spring. It is celebrated throughout India.
- **Vasant Panchami** (Jan/Feb)  
celebrated through the worship of the goddess Sarasvati, the goddess of wisdom and arts.
- **Maha Sivaratri** (Feb/Mar)  
celebrated in honour of Lord Shiva, observed by fast and the worship of Lord Shiva.



- **Holi**  
the Spring festival of colours
- **Ram Navami**  
the celebration of the birth of Lord Rama.
- **Janmashtami**  
the day of the birth of Lord Krishna.
- **Navaratri** (some call it *Durga Puja*)  
Different aspects of the goddess representing *Shakti*, power, are celebrated for the triumph of good over evil around harvest time in Autumn (October).
- **Diwali**  
the festival of light. Celebration is for the return of Rama and Sita to Ayodhya after fourteen years of exile.

## IN BRIEF - RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

### Births

Hindus hold a naming ceremony twelve days after birth so they may not be willing to name the child at birth, although the custom is changing in the cities nowadays.

### Marriages

Many marriages are arranged by parents, but not forced. Traditionally, a suitable partner is introduced by the parents and marriage takes place when the boy and girl accept each other. Now, more and more people are choosing their own partner.

### Death

People cremate the body after death and this usually takes place within twenty four hours.

**Family**

The eldest in the family is highly respected by all the other members. Families are usually patriarchal. A man is usually the head of family, although women are respected. One's own mother is revered by everyone and holds a special place in their heart. Mothers tend to take care of old members of the family. Hindu families tend to take care of their own parents, preferring not to move them to old people's homes.

**Food**

Most Hindus are vegetarians and may also abstain from eating eggs. Some eat non-vegetarian food but not beef. The cow is considered to be sacred.

**SACRED SPACES, PRACTICES AND WORSHIP****How should I greet a Hindu?**

In Hinduism, the greeting is “Namaste”. Hindus put their hands in the Namaste greeting and touch their forehead as a sign of respect. During the “Namaste” greeting, one should keep the



palms of both hands together with the fingertips at chin level, nod and say “Namaste”. It means they bow to the essence of the divine, or the deity, in another person. Hindus do not usually shake hands or kiss when meeting other people. They greet each other by saying *Namaste* and folding hands together. Some would show respect by touching their feet if they are older.

**How should you address a Hindu priest?**

A Hindu “priest” is called a Pujari and his principal responsibility is to conduct services of worship, known as “Puja”. Hindu priests also conduct various rites of passage for their community members.

**Do Hindu women wear headgear?**

Traditionally, women wear saris and married women wear a *kumkum* on the forehead: a red dot in the centre between the two eye-brows. When visiting a religious place, Hindus, men and women, cover their heads. It is also a tradition for Hindus to cover their heads when in front of their elderly relatives.

**PRAYER****At what times do Hindus pray?**

Many Hindus say a short prayer when waking up in the morning. The majority of Hindus have a little temple (shrine) in their homes as worship is more of a private than public act. After the morning bath or shower, every Hindu performs the Puja. Puja is the cleaning of the temple, the statues and pictures of the gods, as well as the offering of food and flowers to the gods. A short chanting accompanies all the above activities. It is also important for the members of the family to pray together, and a lamp to



be lit near the temple every night. Hindus pray every evening before they go to bed. In addition, there are times where holy books are read. Hindus also tend to worship collectively at their community temples.

### **What do Hindus need to pray?**

Prayer is primarily an individual act which can take place in any location. Hindus may wish to have religious statues or icons close by. Even though there are no fixed times for prayers, most Hindus prefer to pray in the morning.

### **Do Hindus say a prayer before meals?**

Food is regarded as sacred in Hinduism and it is necessary to worship food before eating it. A prayer is said before eating in Hindu households, and god is thanked for providing food. According to Hinduism, saying a prayer before meals attracts divine awareness to the individual who is eating that food. Food also carries a spiritual power; consequently, there is an increase in the life force in the body after taking food.

## **Death and Dying**

### **Are any prayers said in Hinduism for the dying?**

Preferably, a Hindu should die at home accompanied by his/her friends and family who sing sacred hymns, pray, and read or chant sacred verses. All this is intended to keep the focus of the dying person on Brahman. The most common pray is:

*Goodness, love, grace, and gentleness,  
Courtesy, friendship, and modesty,  
Honesty, penance, and chastity,  
Charity, respect, reverence, and truthfulness,*





*Purity and self-control,  
Wisdom and worship –  
All these together are perfect virtue,  
And are the word of the loving Lord.*

Also, the most common verse is from Bhagavad Gita:

*As a person sheds worn-out garments and wears new ones, likewise, at the time of death, the soul casts off its worn-out body and enters a new one.*

**Are there any special considerations that medical staff should be aware of when a Hindu patient is dying?**

In the last stages of life, a Hindu patient or his/her relative may request the services of a Hindu priest (pandit) to perform holy rites. The pandit can tie a beaded thread around the dying person's neck or wrist. Health and medical staff should not remove this from the patient before or after death without asking the patient's family members.

A family member can read the Hindu Scriptures to the patient. The dying Hindu may want to have a small statue or a picture of the family god, blessing beads and blessings (ex. flowers) placed in close proximity to him/ her. A Hindu may express the wish to offer food, money, and other items for the use of the needy to a religious individual or a temple before his/her death. Family members can place a tiny piece of sacred grass underneath a dying patient's bed. Relatives may want to put a sacred basil leaf on the patient's tongue and pour a few drops of blessed water from the Ganges River on the patient. Also, they may want incense or oil to be burned. If a Hindu patient asks to lie on the ground during his/her last moments, every feasible step should be taken to fulfil his/her desire.

**What is done to the body of a deceased Hindu person?**

A deceased Hindu's body is usually washed by family members. The family may wish to light a small lamp or burn incense near the body with sacred threads and religious objects being left in place. Traditionally, Hindus cremate their dead because a burning dissolution of the body gives swifter, fuller liberation of the soul than the burial which maintains the psychic link of the soul to its just-ended earthly existence.

**HEALTH****Are there any medicines that are not suitable for Hindus?**

Medicine derived from animals such as insulin, heparin type medicines and pancreatic enzyme supplements may not be suitable for vegetarian or vegan patients. It is advisable for the doctor to discuss whether there are suitable alternatives and help the patient make an informed decision.

**SACRED FOOD/DIETARY ISSUES****Is there any period during the year when Hindus fast?**

There are various types of fasting, and they differ according to family and community beliefs. There are several fasting periods in Hinduism. The most common fast in Hinduism is called "Ekadashi". It takes place on the 11th (eleventh) day of each ascending and descending moon and is observed approximately twice a month. Another significant occasion for fasting is the celebration at the start of the year in Shiva's honour. Many Hindus embrace a vegan diet during July and August and fast until night on Mondays and Saturdays.

**What food is allowed in Hinduism?**

The Hindu diet depends on three basic Ayurvedic “vibrations”:

- a) Tamas,
- b) Rajas, and
- c) Sattva.

These three terms define the various foods and influence the physical and astral bodies. Hindus can eat anything that belongs in the Sattvic category, which includes fruits, vegetables, water, and whole grains, nuts and in some sects fish, as it is considered the fruit of the sea. In general, Hindus follow a lacto-vegetarian diet. Hindus generally avoid foods that belong in the Tamasic category which includes meat (pork, beef and poultry), refrigerated foods (eggs, cheese and every food that needs to be cooled and stored during the night), mushrooms, onions, garlic and all other members of the Allium genus (chives, leeks, etc).

**Which drinks are allowed in Hinduism?**

In Hinduism, alcohol consumption is not recommended, but for unique occasions and occupations, it is reluctantly permitted. It also depends on the sect that a Hindu belongs to. Ayurvedic mixtures containing alcohol are not very common, but do exist, and Ayurveda acknowledges that some alcoholic beverages (such as herbal wine) may have health advantages.

**FAMILY ISSUES****What is the position of Hinduism on adoption?**

Hinduism accepts adoption, as this is even found in Hindu texts. For example, the Wealth goddess was not born of a human mother. Janak and Radha Vrishvanu embraced her as Sita, and



she was raised with love and care. In Hinduism, adoption is not incorrect or contrary to social standards. Parents without male children are urged to adopt because of religious convictions. Hinduism suggests that having male children is essential for post-funeral rituals to guarantee that the soul moves up to the ancestor areas.

Male children give the pinda and tarpan (support) during their life to their ancestors' souls. Hindus can adopt a male child to carry on pinda and tarpan if they are unable to have sons of their own. If Hindus want to adopt male children, adopting their brothers' or cousins' male children is ideal. This way, their son(s) come from the same pool of genes and have ancestral associations. Hindus also have the freedom to adopt other children who are in need or difficulty.

### **What is the position of Hinduism on fostering?**

Hinduism accepts fostering as it is also connected with its religious roots. Krishna and his brother Balarama were given to foster parents to be saved from the demon Kansa.

### **What is the position of Hinduism on divorce?**

Hindus' attitudes and ideas towards divorce differ from community to community. Divorce occurs rarely but is not prohibited. It is uncommon because of cultural variables and attitudes, and because of arranged marriages. The basic belief of Hinduism is the Karma. Some Hindus disagree with divorce because they feel that it can traumatise their offspring and families and upset them. Others agree with divorce because living together in hatred sets a bad example to the children and has bad karmic implications.

Marriage can break down for different reasons. Many Hindus who have marital issues will attempt to solve them because they want to maintain the family together and because they hold that



ending a marriage implies that they have failed to fulfil dharma. Some Hindus may choose to remain in marriages despite being dissatisfied because they believe that abandoning the vow of the life-long union will have bad karmic effects, or because they feel socially pressured by the family or the Hindu community.

### **What is the position of Hinduism on polygamy?**

In Hinduism, polygamy is forbidden, and is also prohibited by law. A Hindu marriage is indissoluble in life, according to Hindu Holy Scriptures. However, in ancient Hindu society, polygamy was rampantly practiced. Since polygamy is forbidden by law, for Hindus, monogamy is the only option.

## **Tools for those with Hindu Patients and Clients**

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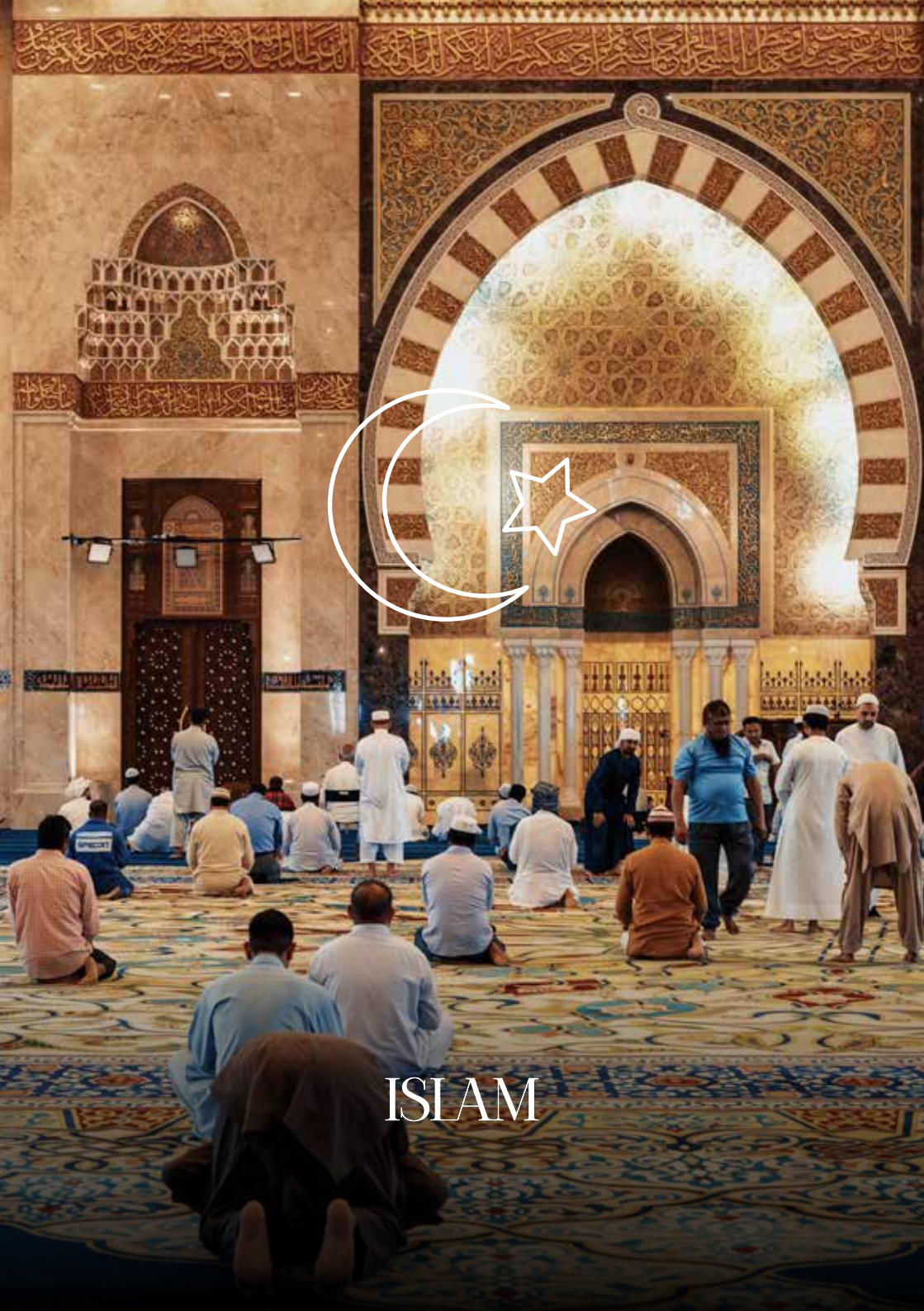
Hindus may wish to pray or meditate in front of an image of one or more Hindu deities. Below an image is provided for such purposes. Of particular note to nursing and palliative care staff is that many Hindus wish to spend periods of illness, pain or their final moments gazing upon the image of a deity, a purpose for which the image below is also suitable.

Administrators of such institutions may also wish to acquire a bottle of 'Ganga Jal' - water from the Ganges river, a few drops of which are placed on the dying patient's tongue. They may also wish to acquire a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, an important Hindu Holy book. Both of these items are found online or in Indian speciality shops. It is important to note that 'Ganga Jal' does not have a period of validity or an expiration date, and may be stored indefinitely.



An image of Lord Shiva, his wife Parvati and their son, Ganesha.





ISLAM



# INTRODUCTION

**“Today I have perfected your religion for you,  
completed My blessing upon you,  
and chosen as your religion *Islam*...”**

(Q.5:3)

Islam originated in Mecca, in modern-day Saudi Arabia, where a young merchant by the name of Muḥammad (c. 570-632) proclaimed the oneness of God and his call to all humanity to submit to him. From its Arab roots it spread its branches across different cultures from the Far East to North and Sub-Saharan Africa.

There are over 1.8 billion Muslims in the world, forming an immense community without an apparent structure and making Islam a highly diverse community.

Islam is considered by Muslims as the pact (*mīṭāq*) that took place at the dawn of time, at the moment of creation, and through which God established humanity in proper relation to other creatures and himself (Q.7:172-173). This pact was periodically broken by humanity and re-established by God, who sent down the book of his word to the prophets/messengers, from Abraham to Moses, from Jesus to Muḥammad.

Muslims believe that the revelation given to Muḥammad takes up in all its purity the primordial covenant, which goes beyond Judaism and Christianity, and marks the birth of the last community, which will never fall into error.





## **PRESENCE IN MALTA**

The Muslim presence in Malta dates back to the island's occupation by the Aghlabid dynasty in 870. Islam remained dominant till 1091, when the Maltese Islands were captured by the Normans, and a process of re-Christianization followed. Muslims appear again during the rule of the Knights of the Order of St John Hospitallers (1530-1798). Most of them were slaves in captivity or semi-captivity who worked on various projects undertaken by the Order. During this period, it appears that they had at least two places of worship, one in Marsa and another one in Valletta.

In the 1970s Muslim presence re-emerged due to the political and economic ties forged by the then Labour government with numerous Arab countries, especially with Libya. This led to the establishment of a permanent Muslim community in Malta by way of projects including a mosque, an Islamic Centre, as well as a Muslim school which caters for primary education. Added to this is the presence of migrants from North and Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East who are predominantly Muslim. The present number of Muslims in Malta ranges between fifteen and twenty thousand, most of whom belong to the Sunni tradition



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Concerning Islam

## SACRED SPACES, PRACTICES AND WORSHIP

### How do I greet a Muslim?

Try to greet a Muslim as they greet one another. Use the well – known greeting “As-Salaam-Alaikum” which means “Peace is upon you”. Keep in mind that the greeting “As-Salaam-Alaikum” is used when you arrive or leave a meeting and has the meaning of “Hello” and “Goodbye”. If you greet a Muslim, he/she will return the greeting regardless of the religion of the other person. It’s against their religion to refuse to greet you back.

Another issue that accompanies the greeting is the handshake. Shake hands with a male Muslim only if you are male. If you are male, do not shake hand with female Muslims, unless she starts the handshake. Female Muslims avoid the handshake and physical contact with any man outside their family (husband, brother, father) due to religious restrictions. Some female Muslims, especially those who work in business environments, prefer to wear gloves, to bypass the restriction on touching a male who is not a relative. Also, if you are a female do not shake hands with male Muslims. They avoid touching any women outside their family (mother, wife, and daughter). For male Muslims, to avoid the touching of women is a gesture of respect and modesty. Greet a person of the opposite sex by putting your hand on your chest.

**In Islam, how do you address the Imam?**

A Muslim Imam is addressed as “Imam”, and you can add his name after the honorary title. You should avoid calling him by his first name unless you know him well personally. In Islam, the term Imam refers to the prayer leader, who may also serve as a spiritual counsellor and Islamic law expert. Traditionally, the Imam is always a man. Avoid physical contact (handshake) with the Imam if you are a female.

**Is male circumcision obligatory for Muslims?**

Circumcision in Islam is one of the rules of cleanliness. It is connected with the religious rituals of praying. Islam recommends the performance of circumcision at an early age, preferably the 7th day after birth, but it can be accomplished up to 40 days after birth or up to age seven (7) depending on the child's or infant's health. Circumcision is not mentioned in the Qur'an, but it is emphasized in the Sunnah (words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad). Circumcision, in Islam, is not part of a religious ceremony, and therefore, unlike Judaism, any suitably qualified person can perform it.

**Do Muslims have a birth ceremony?**

Muslims have certain birth customs. The mother and father should perform some rituals after the birth of a child. A female doctor is preferable for the birth of a Muslim child.

The first words that a child should hear after his/her birth is an adhan. The father of the child whispers in the child's right ear an adhan (call to prayer). The most commonly used adhan after birth is “There is no deity but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God”. It is religiously important for Muslim women to breastfeed their children soon after they are born. Shortly



after the child's birth, Muslim women receive dates that are thought to enhance their breast milk quality. Some Muslims also believe that newborn boys should be circumcised on the 7<sup>th</sup> day.

## **PRAYER**

### **What do Muslims need in order to pray?**

Muslims can pray anywhere. They should clean themselves before they pray. Bathing facilities are important. Muslims need a mat if they are not praying in a mosque and knowledge of where to face when praying (for Malta it is East southeast, circa 116° on the compass).

### **At what times do Muslim pray?**

Muslims are required to pray five times every day. The sequence of these prayers is at dawn (Fajr), at noon (Zuhr), late afternoon (Asr), after sunset (Maghrib), and at night (Isha). Muslims should perform these obligatory prayers as early as possible.

### **What should I know if I see the Quran placed on a table or other piece of furniture?**

If there is the Quran on a table or another piece of furniture you should not put any books on top of it.

### **Towards which directions do Muslims pray?**

When praying, Muslims must face Mecca, which is close to East-Southeast from Malta (circa 116° on the compass). There are various apps and websites which provide the Qiblah for the location one is in.



## DEATH AND DYING

### **Are any prayers said in Islam for a dying person?**

Most Muslims exercise specific rituals to prepare the dying person for his death. The Talqeen is carried out for those who are ready to die, to make sure that they are spiritually ready for the journey to death. The leading person of the Talqeen recites to the dying person:

*In the name of Allah and on the creed, religion, and faith of Rasulullah. O! Allah, ease upon him his matters, and make light for him whatever comes hereafter, and honour him with Your meeting and make that which he is going to be better than that which he is leaving.*

Those who are present have the opportunity to share their prayers and the leader of the Talqeen motivates the dying person to remember the Shahada before his/her last breath:

*I bear witness that (there is) no god except Allah; One is He, no partner hath He, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His Servant and Messenger.*

### **Are there any special considerations that medical staff should be aware of when a Muslim patient is on the point of death?**

When Muslim patients are on the point of death, medical staff should allow them to lie on their right side facing Mecca. Also, they should allow their family and friends to sit near them reading the Quran. The reading of the Quran, when a Muslim is ill, brings some spiritual healing, and also works as a means of feeling close to Allah. They can call an Imam if the patient feels the need to see one. They also should help the patient if he/she



wishes to perform the five daily prayers. When a Muslim is dying, or is sick, a large number of visitors will come to visit him/her during the day, as for Muslims, it is a religious duty.

**Who do I call when a Muslim person dies?**

You should call the family and an Imam. The Imam will arrange everything that is needed for the funeral ceremony, which should normally take place within 24 hours after the death of a Muslim.

**Who presides at a Muslim funeral service?**

An Imam always presides over the funeral service.

**Is cremation allowed in Islam?**

Cremation is forbidden to Muslims due to religious reasons.

**HEALTH****What should medical staff keep in mind if they have a Muslim patient under their care?**

A Muslim patient will carry his/her Holy book, the Quran, which the medical staff should treat with respect, and they should avoid putting anything on top of it. A Muslim patient may have the desire to pray five times per day and should therefore be allowed a private space; alternatively, the patient may pray beside his/her bed on a mat. If there are curtains around their bed, they prefer them to be closed.

Muslim patients may bring their prayer mat for the duration of their stay in hospital, but if they do not have one, the medical staff can provide them with a large towel to help them with their prayer. Before prayer, a Muslim patient should wash with running water. For this reason, washing facilities are important for Muslim



patients. If there are no washing facilities, the medical staff may provide them with a jug or cup with water. Muslim patients also follow the modest dress code of Muslims.

Male Muslim patients should be covered from the navel to the knee, and female patients are permitted to expose only their hands and feet. Hospital robes should be flowing and make the patients feel comfortable and safe. Medical staff should also avoid putting a female or male patient in the same room with patients of the opposite sex, as mixing the sexes is not allowed in Islam. Medical staff should also avoid shaking hands with Muslim patients of the opposite sex with whom they should also limit eye contact and touching while talking.

It is preferable that if the patient is female, the doctor who examines her is also a female, and if the patient is a male, the doctor is also a male. If the Muslim patient need to uses a bedpan, the medical staff may also provide them with a jar of water for washing. Medical staff should avoid giving Muslim patients treatments that contain any ingredient derived from pigs (ex. porcine insulin).

### **Are there any medicines that are not suitable for Muslims?**

Medicine derived from animals, particularly from pigs, such as insulin, heparin type medicines, pancreatic enzyme supplements and gelatine capsules may not be suitable for Muslim patients. Various Muslim legal scholars agree that in case of necessity and if no suitable alternative is available, Muslims may make use of these medicines. Nonetheless, it is advisable for the health professionals to discuss whether there are suitable alternatives and to encourage the patient to discuss the issue with the Imam. This will help the patient make an informed decision.



## **SACRED FOOD/ DIETARY ISSUES**

### **Which food is allowed in Islam?**

Only “Halal” food as defined by Islamic nutritional laws is allowed in Islam. In Arabic “Halal” means lawful or permitted. “Halal” foods are those that are free from any component that Islamic law (Shariah) prohibits Muslims from eating, and they are processed, manufactured and stored using utensils, equipment, and machinery purified under Islamic law. Products with a “halal” symbol on their packaging have been authorized by an agency and are certificated free of any elements or ingredients that are prohibited. Examples of “halal” food include the following: cereal products not containing haram ingredients, rice, pasta, fruits and vegetables, cheese, yogurt and ice cream with bacterial culture without animal rennet, certified meat, and poultry, seafood, nuts, eggs, and tofu. “Haram” is the opposite of “Halal” and means unlawful or prohibited. In Islam, these two terms are used in relation to food products, meat products, cosmetics, personal care products, pharmaceuticals, food ingredients, and food contact materials. Muslims are forbidden to consume foods and drinks that are “haram”. Examples of “Haram” food: Cereal products containing haram ingredients (alcohol animal fats, vanilla extract), fruits and vegetables containing haram ingredients (alcohol, animal fats, gelatine, bacon), cheese, yogurt and ice cream made with animal rennet, vanilla extract, gelatine, pepsin or lipase, pork and its products, non-certified meat and poultry and any product prepared with alcohol or animal fats.

### **Which gifts should I avoid giving a Muslim?**

You can give a variety of things as gifts to Muslim friend, and colleagues. If you are planning to give them a food-related gift keep in mind “halal” and “haram”. Avoid food if you are not sure





that the type of food that you would like to buy is permitted in the Muslim diet. Alcohol is “haram” and is insulting if you offer it to a Muslim as a gift. Avoid perfumes as they also contain alcohol, and are not a good choice as a gift. Also, avoid any gift that includes a representation of the human body. For little girls, avoid buying dolls in a swimsuit or short dresses. If you would like to give candies as a gift make sure that they do not contain alcohol or gelatine (unless it’s kosher/halal, i.e., non-pork based) which is also found in marshmallows, gums, and chewy candies like taffy, gummy bears and jelly beans. It is important for Muslims that one respects their privacy and modesty, so avoid giving clothes or other personal items (such as make up) as gifts, especially if you are not particularly close to the person. Always give your gift to a Muslim friend or colleague with both hands or with your right hand. Giving a gift with the left hand is regarded as insulting.

**When do Muslims fast?**

Muslims are obliged to fast during the month of Ramadan. During this month they usually abstain from food, drink, smoking, and sexual activity between dawn and nightfall. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Muslim lunar calendar.

**At what age do Muslims start fasting during Ramadan?**

It is not necessary for Muslim children to fast during Ramadan before they reach mature age (puberty, around 14 years old). At 14 years of age, they are considered adults, and should make their own decisions regarding their religious responsibilities. During Ramadan, Muslim family routines and mealtimes are changed, and there is more time for community gatherings and family visits. In many Muslim families, young children are encouraged to participate in fasting in a way that is suitable



for their age. It is common for them to fast for a part of a day, for example from 5 am until lunchtime. It is not common for young children to fast more than a short period during the day; some older children may push themselves to try a bit longer. However, this is generally left to the child, as children are not put under any pressure.

### **Who is exempt from fasting?**

As with the case of other faith groups, several groups are exempt from the duty of fasting during Ramadan, which in each case is not considered to be mandatory. These groups include:

1. People who suffer from any type of physical illness, temporary or permanent, where there is the possibility that fasting may worsen their health condition or slow their recovery. Such persons should be careful and protect themselves. Furthermore, if a sick person feels that fasting can slow down the recovery process or cause more damage to the body, he/she is also exempt from fasting. But if healthy persons feel tired or find fasting difficult, they are not allowed to halt their fast, and there is no excuse for them to break their fast.
2. Travellers, but only under some special conditions: a) The journey duration and distance should be such that it falls within the category that allows shortened prayers. b) The traveller should not intend to settle at the place he is traveling to. c) The traveling purpose should not be sinful. That is because such exemption is considered a concession and a relief that the sinner doesn't deserve on his journey leading to sin. Two things can terminate this travel concession: a) When the traveller returns to the place where he/she is a resident and b) When the traveller decides to remain in a location, permanently or for a long time, and the location is suitable for settling in.



3. Women during pregnancy or nursing. This group cannot participate in Ramadan, since fasting can harm the mother or the child's health. However, women have to do qaza and pay fidya for every day of fasting, after their pregnancy or child weaning.
4. Women who have a monthly period cycle. They can continue their fasting when their period has ended.
5. Senility and old age. This group includes people who are old and have lost their strength, or who are near death. Old age implies weakness, terminal illnesses, loss of mental abilities, and extreme fragility; so it is believed that the elderly do not have to fast at the expense of their health.
6. Children who have not reached puberty. Fasting for children who have not reached puberty is not compulsory. Once they do, it becomes necessary.
7. People who have a mental illness. Individuals who are mentally challenged or victims of any mental illness that affects their entire cognition are not required to fast during Ramadan.

## **FAMILY ISSUES**

### **Are there any fixed gender roles within a Muslim family?**

Muslims are generally very family- and community-oriented. They normally feel a certain amount of responsibility towards family members. In many Muslim societies, husbands and wives have different gender roles, with men normally being upheld as the head of the household, responsible for financial and decision making responsibilities, while females take on the domestic and child rearing responsibilities. One needs to be sensitive to the intergenerational conflict that arises from the constriction on gender roles.

**What is the position of Islam on adoption?**

Adoption is allowed in Islam. It is permitted to raise a child who is not your genetic child and it is even encouraged in the case of the adoption of orphans, yet it is not allowed to change the family name of the adopted child.

**What is the position of Islam on fostering?**

Islam attaches great significance to the appropriate care, well-being, and education of children, particularly in vulnerable situations. Quranic Law has well-defined rules governing a child's different situations, whether he or she is an orphan or abandoned and neglected. So, fostering is allowed in Islam.

**What is the position of Islam on divorce?**

Islamic divorce can take many forms, some initiated by the husband and some initiated by the wife. Talaq (repudiation, see Q. 2:229), khul (mutual divorce, wherein the wife requests the husband to proclaim talaq, see Q. 229), judicial divorce, and oaths are the main traditional legal categories.

In Islam, traditionally, divorce rules were controlled by Sharia, as construed by classical Islamic jurisprudence, although they differed according to legal schools, and traditional practices often varied from legal principles. According to the Quran, marriage is designed to be timely, as stated by its description as a “strong bond” and by the divorce rules. Ideally, the connection between the husband and wife should be based on love and mutual respect and the important decisions should be taken by agreement.



The Quran allows and even advises the husband and wife to bring the marriage to an end when marital harmony cannot be achieved. However, this choice should not be taken lightly, and the community is called upon to take action by appointing arbitrators from both families to try to reconcile the couple.

**What is the position of Islam on polygamy?**

Polygamy is permitted in Islam under certain circumstances and can be practiced only under certain conditions and with limitations (see Q. 4:2-3). A man is allowed to marry again if his wife is chronically ill and is unable to fulfill their marriage commitments, or unable to give him children.

Under certain circumstances, such as in times of war, it may be necessary to protect the principles of society by marrying widows so as to care for orphans. A Muslim husband can have up to four (4) wives. Women married to a chronically ill, sterile or impotent husband are allowed to divorce if they consider their marriage to be unbearable.



## **Tools for Those working with Muslim Patients and Clients**

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It may be helpful to indicate the direction of Mecca in rooms or areas where Muslims may be praying, such as a multi-faith prayer room, or in hospital wards. This can be done via a sign or notice on the part of the room facing Mecca. Mecca is 116° East, Southeast of Malta, which can be determined via the use of a navigational compass or app such as Google Maps. Many websites also exist for this purpose.

Places expecting Muslim visitors and clients may wish to acquire a copy of the Qur'an.

## **Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at**

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The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at, or Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, is a Muslim community that has been present in Malta since 2009. The Ahmadiyya community originates in 19th century British India, in Punjab, but now has adherents in over 200 countries worldwide. Ahmadiyya Muslims adhere to the Six Articles of Islamic Faith and the Five Pillars of Islam, like all other Muslims - so all the preceding questions are equally valid for Ahmadiyya Muslims; however, this community is distinguished by the belief in Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, whom they hold to be the promised Mahdi (Guided One) and Messiah foretold by the Prophet Muhammed in the Qur'an, a view not shared by Muslims of other denominations. The Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Malta is far smaller than the more widespread Sunni community, so if any doubts arise about procedures and etiquette concerning the community, one is advised to make respectful enquiries.



JUDAISM



# INTRODUCTION

Where one may assume that there is such a thing as a ‘typical’ Jewish person, this is far from correct. A person who considers themselves Jewish may be orthodox, traditional, reformed, non-practising or even non-believing. Non-believing Jews typically adhere to Jewishness as an ethnicity more than a religious practice, and it may not affect their interaction with society and its institutions in any way.

Non-practising Jews may have been raised in a culturally and religiously Jewish atmosphere, but choose not to practise or uphold the tenets of their inherited faith. Still, this cultural inheritance may make them uncomfortable with practices such as the consumption of pork products or shellfish.

Orthodox, traditional and reformed Jews observe the religious tenets of Judaism, albeit in different ways and to different degrees.

A Jewish community has been present in Malta for centuries and may even predate the Roman period, though it has, at times, numbered less than a dozen individuals. Currently, the needs of Jewish travellers are met by the Chabad of Malta, an international Hasidic organisation that attends to the religious and social needs of Jewish communities worldwide.





# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Concerning Judaism

### **Sacred Spaces and Worship**

#### **How do I greet a Jewish person?**

For persons of the same gender, any customary greeting, including a handshake or a hug, is acceptable. However, when a man is introduced to a Jewish lady or vice versa, one should avoid physical contact. One can use any conventional phrase, such as “Nice to meet you” and a nod and smile but avoid offering to shake hands. Non-orthodox Jews may consider that the handshake is not an intimate gesture and do not find it objectionable to greet another person of the opposite sex with a handshake. Consequently, the best practice is to let the Jewish person himself or herself make the first move.

#### **In Judaism, how do you address the community’s religious leader?**

The person appointed as religious leader of a Jewish community is called Rabbi. The Rabbi is qualified through studies of the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud as a religious leader and teacher but does not have any priestly function. Rabbis are addressed as “Rabbi [first name]” or “Rabbi [surname]”

**Do Jewish women wear headgear?**

Women do not cover their hair daily in most Conservative and Reform Jewish faith groups, although they tend to cover their heads in the synagogue during prayers. In the Orthodox Jewish groups, most rabbis regard hair covering as a duty for all married women. They can cover their hair with a wing (sheitel), a hat, or a scarf (Tichel).

**PRAYER****What do Jewish people need to pray?**

Every male Jew over the age of thirteen years old needs his “Tallit” or prayer shawl for his morning prayer. Also, some male Jews may need to wear their “Tephillin” (two, small, black, leather boxes, which contain tiny scripts of the Torah). They wear the one on their forehead and the other one on their left arm or hand. Furthermore, a Jewish prayer book is mandatory during every Jewish prayer. During prayer they should concentrate exclusively on God and should not have any distractions.

**At what times do Jewish people pray?**

Jews are duty bound to pray three times per day: in the morning (Shacharit), in the afternoon (Minchah) and in the evening (Arvith or Maariv). The Jewish book of prayers (Siddur) includes special prayers for each time. There are the thanksgiving prayers, the prayers of praise and the prayers that ask God for one’s needs. Many Jewish prayers include reciting aloud and singing hymns in the synagogue as well as prayers recited in private or public.



## **DEATH AND DYING**

### **Are there any special considerations that medical staff should be aware of when a Jewish patient is dying?**

A dying Jew may request the presence of a rabbi at any time to pray with him or her and to perform a “vidui” (confess one’s sins). There are many religious and ethical issues that arise when a Jew is on the point of death. The health professional would do well to discuss eventualities with the patient or his/her close relatives who may want to consult a rabbi for guidance. For Jews, when on the point of death no action can be taken that will hasten or delay death. Issues that can arise include whether or not to inform the patient that he/she is near death (some Jews hold that the patient should not discuss impending death, as this would worry them prematurely into death); what to do if life support or resuscitation attempts are indicated; the use of feeding tubes, withholding or withdrawing treatment and possible organ donation after death, amongst others.

### **How should medical staff treat the deceased Jew?**

When a Jewish patient dies, the relatives of the deceased should be informed immediately. A Rabbi may be called to perform the Last Rites. The body should not be touched by a non-Jew and a Jewish person may be asked to carry out the ritual washing of the body. The family may want to keep watch with the body and pray. If the rabbi or family members are not readily available, the healthcare staff can perform the essential procedures, wearing gloves and close the eyes and mouth, remove tubing (but see that any catheters and drains containing fluid are kept near the body, as these are considered part of the body and need to be



buried), lay the body flat with hands open and parallel to the body and cover the body with a white sheet. The body should not be washed by healthcare staff.

**When does the Jewish funeral normally take place?**

A Jewish funeral is held as soon as possible after death. Traditionally, it is supposed to be held within 24 hours after death, but Jewish funerals cannot take place on the Sabbath, nor most Jewish holidays.

**What is the position of Judaism with regard to post-mortem examination?**

Orthodox Jews oppose post-mortems unless required by law; reformed Jews permit the examination if required by law and if done to further medical knowledge.

**Is cremation allowed in Judaism?**

The Torah, Jewish law, commands that human remains are buried in the ground. Cremation goes against Jewish beliefs and norms. Conservative Jewish rabbis teach that cremation is prohibited. However, some liberal rabbis tolerate cremation and allow cremated Jews to have a proper burial in a Jewish cemetery.

**MEDICINE****Are there any medicines that are not suitable for Jews?**

Medicine derived from animals, particularly from pigs, such as insulin, heparin type medicines and pancreatic enzyme supplements may not be suitable for Jewish patients. If the pork-derived medicine is not considered edible then it is allowed.



There are no restrictions regarding injections. However, it is advisable for the doctor to discuss whether there are suitable alternatives and help the patient make an informed decision.

## **SACRED FOOD/DIETARY ISSUES**

### **Do Jews pray before meals?**

Traditionally, Jews say a short prayer of blessing before eating. There are different blessings for types of food, but all beginning “Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe..” and then “who brings forth bread from the earth”, or “who creates the fruit of the vine”, or “who creates the fruit of the tree”, or “who creates the fruit of the ground”, or “who creates varieties of nourishment” for bread, wine, fruit, vegetables or grains respectively or simply ending with the generic “at whose word all came to be” for miscellaneous food.

### **Which foods are prohibited in Judaism?**

Judaism imposes rather strict dietary laws called Kashrut specifying which food may or may not be eaten and how it is to be prepared and eaten. Permissible food prepared in the right way is known as kosher food. Certain animals may not be eaten at all. These include, but are not limited to, pigs, rabbits, reptiles, and shellfish. Mammals that have split hooves and chew their cud, (including cows, sheep, goats, oxen, deer) are kosher. Birds of prey and scavengers are not permitted: other birds such as chicken, ducks and turkey are. Only fish with fins and scales are permitted. Meat cannot be eaten with dairy. Grape products, such as wines which have been made by non-Jews are not kosher.



### **Are there any prohibitions on drink in Judaism?**

There are no restrictions to what drinks Jewish people can consume, except that grape products (wine and grape juice) made by non-Jews cannot be consumed.

### **What is a Shabbat dinner?**

For religious Jews, the Sabbath (often referred to with the Hebrew word Shabbat) is a day of rest that starts from Friday evening and lasts until the sunset on Saturday. Those who are strict in their observance of the Shabbat do not do any work at all, not even the most minor tasks, on this day, but others may be less strict in their observance. However, most Jews look forward to the Shabbat, which is considered God's gift. On this day, Jews refrain from doing everyday chores or activities, get away from their work schedule, possibly not even using the telephone, and most importantly, try to put their worries aside. The Sabbath is, thus, a day of calm, when families get together and enjoy each other's company in the presence of God. Jews like to wear nice clothes to celebrate the Sabbath.

For non-orthodox Jews, the Shabbat dinner is normally held on the evening of Friday (sometimes following attendance at the synagogue. It starts with the lighting of candles, blessing of the children by the parents/grandparents) and drinking of the Sabbath wine, which is a sweet wine and is usually drunk from a special goblet known as the Kiddush Cup. It is customary to eat Challah (braided bread made with eggs, water, flour, yeast and salt) and also to eat meat, considered a luxury and suitable for such a festive day. On the Sabbath, Jews greet each other with "*Shabbat Shalom*" or in Yiddish, "*Gut Shabbos*".

**Are there any days when Jews are obliged to fast?**

From puberty onwards Orthodox Jews observe several days on which they do not eat any food or drink anything. Non-orthodox Jews are much more liable to skip most fast days or to observe less strict rules. “Yom Kippur”, that falls in September/October on the Gregorian calendar, is generally observed to some extent by all Jews, including secular one. Yom Kippur is known as the Day of Atonement, and is a full-day fast, from sunset of the eve to the sunset of the following day. During this time, no food or drink or any pleasurable activity is allowed. It is the only fast day which is also observed if it falls on the Sabbath. The second major fast day which is also a full fast day with strict requirements is Tisha B’Av, that falls in July/August.

There are another 4 less strict public minor fasts that require fasting between dawn and sunset. These are: Fast of Gedalia (in September/October), Tenth of Tevet (December/January), Seventeenth of Tammuz (June/July) and Fast of Esther (February/March). The sick, pregnant, nursing women and elderly individuals who are not in good health are exempt from fasting.

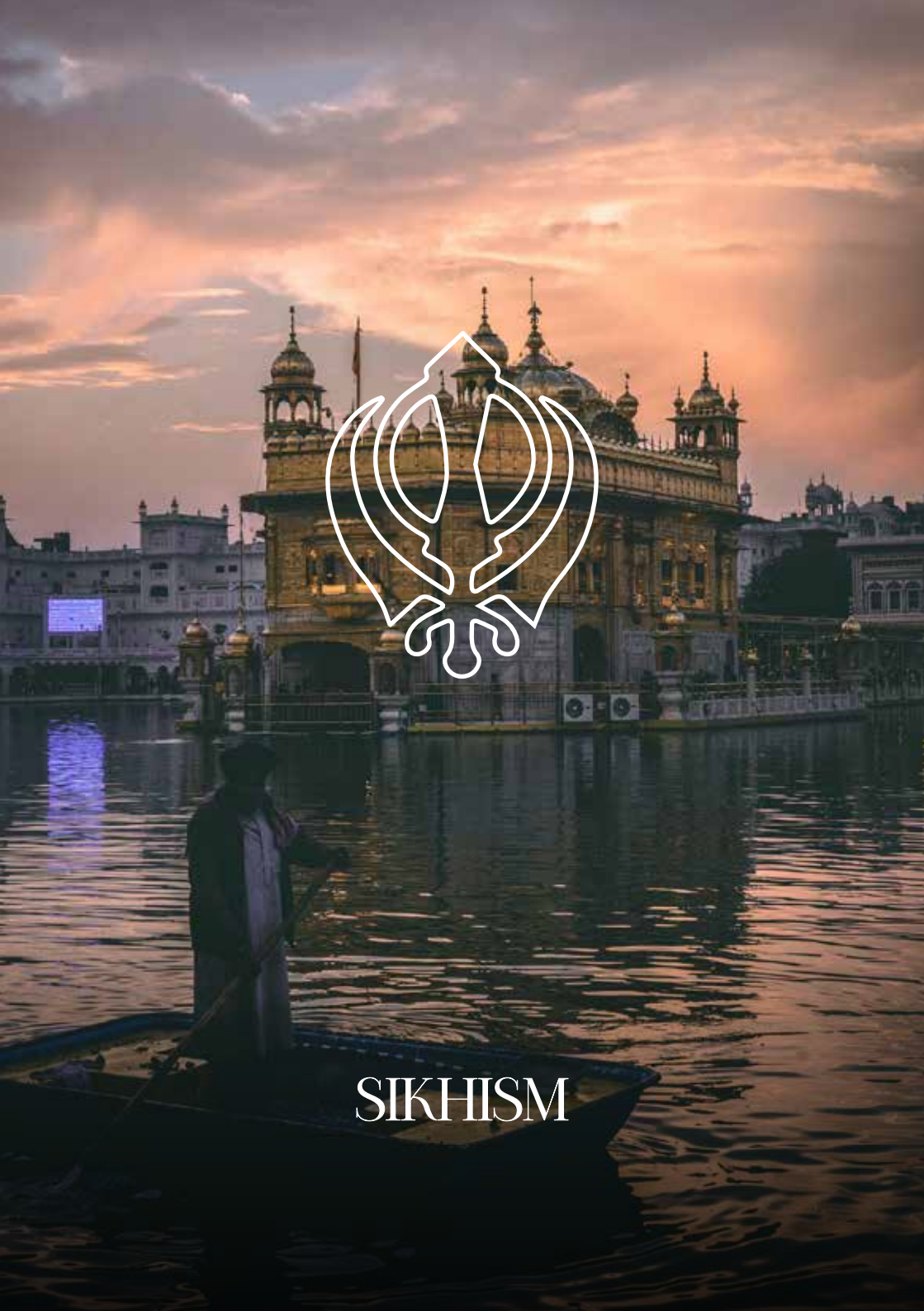


## **Tools for those with Jewish Patients and Clients**

*Shema Yisrael* is the most important prayer in the Jewish prayer service. Its twice-daily recitation is a *mitzvah* (religious commandment) for Jewish people. It is traditional for Jews to say the Shema as their last words and for children to say the *Shema*, or parts of it, before they go to sleep at night.

The *Shema* is often found inside a wider collection of prayers known as a Siddur. Your organisation may want to consider obtaining a copy of the Siddur if it will frequently engage with Jewish patients or clients.





SIKHISM



# INTRODUCTION

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion that originated in Punjab, India in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is based on the revelation of Guru Nanak. Followers of Sikhism are called Sikhs, which means 'disciple', or 'student'. Sikhs are most commonly identified by their appearance, as Sikhs who have undergone the baptism-like ceremony of *Amrit* are obliged to have the five articles of faith on their body at all times. These are known as the five 'Ks' of Sikhism, and are:

## **Kesh**

Uncut hair, representing acceptance of God's will and willingness to lead a simple life.

## **Kara**

A steel bracelet worn on the wrist, representing restraint, the infinite nature of God and the connection to the Sikh community.

## **Kanga**

A wooden comb, worn in the hair, representing the need to respect God's creation.

## **Kaccha**

Cloth Undergarments, symbolizing chastity and moderation.

## **Kirpan**

A ceremonial sword or dagger. In India, this may be a full-length sword, but in Western countries is most often a small, discreetly worn ceremonial or decorative dagger. It represents the defence of the weak and the struggle against injustice.



## MAIN FESTIVITIES

As of 2020, there are around 200 Sikhs in Malta. They do not have a formal temple or meeting place, but meet as part of the wider Indian community. Major Sikh feast days are as follows:

• <b>Birth of Guru Gobind Singh</b>	January 05
• <b>Maghi - Lohri</b>	January 14
• <b>Holi</b>	March 10
• <b>Hola Mohalla</b>	Late March
• <b>Vaisakhi</b>	April 14
• <b>Birth of Guru Angad Dev</b>	April 18
• <b>Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev Sahib</b>	June 16
• <b>Birth of the Guru Granth Sahib</b>	October 20
• <b>Diwali</b>	November 14
• <b>Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib</b>	November 24
• <b>Birth of Guru Nanak</b>	November 30



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Concerning the Sikh Community

## SACRED SPACES, PRACTICES AND WORSHIP

### How do I greet a Sikh?

The traditional Sikh greeting is done with folded hands but, especially in the Western world, the normal practice is a handshake between persons of the same gender. Family members, or very close friends, male or female, may embrace each other. The traditional Sikh greeting is 'Sat Sri Akal' (God is the Truth) and can be used also when a male greets a female, or vice versa. The greeting is generally done with folded hands, especially when greeting someone of the opposite sex.

### Which gifts should I avoid giving a Sikh?

Sikhs do not drink alcohol and do not smoke. However, Sikhs that are not religious do drink, and social drinking is culturally accepted. To be on the safe side, one should avoid giving alcohol or tobacco-related gifts. Otherwise, gift choices should be based on the personal tastes of the giver and the recipient and can vary widely based on the occasion, the budget and the cultural context.

### Do all male Sikhs wear a turban?

For Sikhs, wearing a turban is an expression of their faith and their identity. The Sikh turban, known as the Dastar, together with their long uncut hair and long beard, is what most identifies



Sikhs. All baptised Sikhs are obliged to wear the turban and practically all Sikhs, weather initiated or not, wear it. Even children, once their hair has grown to a length and volume that becomes unmanageable, often wear a Sikh head covering called a Patka.

**Do Sikh women wear headgear?**

A baptised Sikh woman must cover her head. She can wear a turban, or a long scarf called a *Chunni* (which is the most common headgear among Sikh ladies). Many non-baptised Sikh women also cover their head due to cultural tradition. All Sikh women are obliged to cover their head when at the place of worship. Maintaining uncut hair for both males and females is one of the most identifiable articles of the Sikh faith, so the head covering is a means of keeping their hair clean and ordered.

**PRAYER****What do Sikhs need to pray?**

Sikhs need to meditate when praying, and therefore need a quiet space, with a carpet and as few things as possible that may distract their thoughts.

**At what times do Sikhs pray?**

There are set prayers that Sikhs recite three times per day; early morning, evening, and before bedtime. The Sikh code of conduct, the *Reht Maryada*, gives precise instruction about morning prayer: the Sikh should wake up 3 hours before dawn, bathe and, concentrating on the One Immortal Being, repeat the name *Waheguru* (Wondrous Destroyer of darkness). ( *Reht Maryada* , chapter 3.) Sikhs can also pray privately at any time of the day. Sikhs also see communal worship at the *Gurdwara*, as having



special merits. They regard prayer as spending time with God, whom they praise with their prayers. Prayers are more effective if the person, through meditation, empties the mind of any earthly thought.

**Do Sikhs say a prayer before meals?**

Sikhs usually recite a traditional prayer both before and after meals.

**DEATH AND DYING****Are there any special considerations that medical staff should be aware of when a Sikh patient is dying?**

A dying Sikh would wish to meditate on spiritual matters when nearing death. Family members may want to help the moribund to prepare for the important moment of passing to another life by reading and chanting relevant excerpts from the Sikh scriptures, the *Gura Granth Sahib*. When nearing death and for some time after death, Sikhs would want to leave a light in the room until such time that the soul is deemed to have left the body. Sikhs would appreciate efforts by medical staff to facilitate these requirements.

**How should medical staff treat the deceased Sikh?**

Healthcare staff can wash the Sikh deceased's body if his/her family members agree. Many Sikh families may want to clean the body themselves. If the healthcare staff conducts the washing process, female medical staff should wash a female body and males a male body. Baptised Sikhs would normally wear the five Sikhs signs (5 K) known as Panj Kakaars, (uncut hair, wooden comb, steel bracelet, a particular type of underwear called a



Kachha, and a (small) sword, which should not be removed without the consent of a family member.) Medical staff should not cut the hair of the deceased or remove hair from his/her body. Sikhs do not use religious icons and in the mortuary area where the corpse is held before the funeral, there should not be icons or symbols of other religions.

### **Is cremation allowed in Sikhism?**

In Sikhism cremation is preferred to other methods of disposing of the dead body. However, other methods of disposal are permitted. If the body is buried on land, Sikhs do not place a headstone over the grave. When cremation is used, the ashes are scattered in running water, or buried in the ground.

## **HEALTH**

### **What does the medical staff need to know when a Sikh woman is due to give birth?**

Like many other women practitioners of different faiths, Sikh women have a strong preference for the assistance of female health professionals during childbirth. They may also wish to wear the outward symbols of their faith during childbirth. They may object to shaving their pubic hair. If this is considered to be clinically necessary, the health professional should approach the subject sensitively.

### **What is the position of Sikhism regarding blood transfusion?**

Blood transfusion is permitted in the Sikh faith. It is, indeed, a blessing for a Sikh to support another human being.

**What is the position of Sikhism regarding contraception?**

There are no rules in Sikhism against the use of contraceptives for family planning. The married couple may make their own decisions on matters related to this subject.

**SACRED FOOD/ DIETARY ISSUES****Which food is allowed in Sikhism?**

Baptised Sikhs, that is, those who have taken Amrit initiation, are vegetarian. They also exclude eggs and any ingredients with animal derivatives from their diet. Other Sikhs may eat meat but are not allowed to eat the meat of animals killed in a ritualistic manner, such as halal or kosher.

**Is drinking alcohol permitted in Sikhism?**

Sikhs are not permitted to drink alcohol.

**Is there any period during the year when Sikhs fast?**

Sikhs do not fast for religious reasons.

**If invited to a Sikh dinner/lunch/feast, should I take a gift?**

When a Sikh invites someone to their home for lunch or dinner or other occasions, it is common for the host to give a gift to their guests, especially if this is the guest's first visit to their place.

The guest should be ready to reciprocate the gesture. Flowers or sweets are appropriate gifts to give on such occasions. Do not offer wine or other spirits. It is customary to offer the gifts using both hands. Choose a bright colour for the wrapping paper of your gifts. You can use paper in green, yellow and red, which are considered colours of good fortune.





## **FAMILY ISSUES**

### **Are males and females equal in Sikhism?**

Sikhs believe in equality of all human beings irrespective of race, gender or social status. The Sikhs scriptures say that women are equal to men; they possess the same souls as men and therefore have the same rights and duties as men. However, culturally, women may adopt a submissive role.

### **What is the position of Sikhism regarding adoption?**

Adoption is permitted and encouraged in Sikhism.

### **What is the position of Sikhism regarding fostering?**

Fostering is permitted and encouraged in Sikhism, as it is an act of love towards others.

### **What is the position of Sikhism regarding divorce?**

Sikhs consider marriage to be very important. In marriage, the couple enter into a religious commitment to an inseparable union till the end of their lives, made in front of the Guru and the family. Sikhs are therefore expected by the community to work hard to ensure that their marriage survives. If the marriage does break down, couples may separate, but their marriage will still be considered to be ongoing. Notwithstanding this teaching, Sikhs do divorce in countries where divorce is permitted. This is, reluctantly, being tolerated.

### **What is the position of Sikhism regarding polygamy?**

*The* Sikhism code of conduct since 1935, advises that “generally” a Sikh ought not to marry again as long as his wife is living. Polygamy is hardly ever practised by Sikhs. Moreover, Sikhs generally follow the law of the country where they reside.







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