



Pupils from Religious Minorities

Armenians, Maronites, Latins, Catholic Christians, Pomaks, Muslims, Protestants, Irrelegion, Greek/Christian Orthodox, Rastafarians, Sikh, Jews, Buddhists, Hindu, Neo-paganists





Classroom-based tips (focus on instructional methods)

1. **Develop and implement an antiracist policy**, which deals with any incidents of racism towards migrant pupils because any aspect of their identity, such as their background, accent, language skills, appearance, legal status in the country of arrival or religion.
2. **Develop co-operative learning** in order to allow the personal skills and knowledge of the members of the group to become integration criteria, rather than their ethnic or religious affiliation.
3. **Promote understanding, respect, and capacity for dialogue among people with different views**; teach controversial issues related to religion and faith and deal with them rather than avoid them (e.g. euthanasia, abortion, blood transfusion, IVF, marriage, status of women, homosexuality, gender of priests).
4. **Provide a welcoming atmosphere to explore different views** regarding faith and religion in the classroom.
5. **Implement rules of dialogue to promote respect** for each other.
6. **Promote knowledge and understanding** and avoid promoting a particular religious or non-religious view.
7. **Employ methods such as role-play and drama** to try to reconstruct someone else's religious ideas or feelings, without focusing or commenting on individuals in the classroom.
8. **Allow pupils who wish to pray during certain hours to do so privately**, if the school has a suitable space for that.
9. **Organise religious festivals in order to provide opportunities for pupils to recognise the richness and diversity in their group**, and to put their own experiences in a wider context. Give pupils opportunities to discover similarities and differences between and within each religious practice.



School-based practical tips (focus on instructional methods)

Community

1. Promote positive values in the school community, such as knowledge, respect and courtesy, valuing the individual, family and community, non-discrimination, acceptance of various traditions and difference.

2. Develop religious education in co-operation with religious communities.
3. Collaborate with local and faith communities that represent all religions of the pupils and the community.
4. Promote encounters with representatives of the major religions (e.g. visits to the church, the mosque, the synagogue and the Buddhist temple) and support pupils with additional guidance in class.

Curricular Adaptations

1. Include opportunities in the curriculum for staff and pupils to study the issues raised by valuing religious diversity and faith.
2. Develop religious education in co-operation with religious communities.
3. Implement a multi-religious systematic approach, by presenting all religions side by side without preferences of any kind.

Discipline

Develop and implement an antiracist policy, which deals with any incidents of racism towards migrant pupils because any aspect of their identity, such as their background, accent, language skills, appearance, legal status in the country of arrival or religion.

Educational Visits / Field Trips / Camps / School Exchanges / Trips Abroad

Promote encounters with representatives of the major religions (e.g. visits to the church, the mosque, the synagogue and the Buddhist temple) and support pupils with additional guidance in class.

Food: Canteen / Visits / Camps / Trips

Reflect the diversity of cultures and needs in the food provided in school.

Parents / Parents' Associations

Develop religious education in co-operation with religious communities.

Safety

1. Develop and implement an antiracist policy, which deals with any incidents of racism towards migrant pupils because any aspect of their identity, such as their background, accent, language skills, appearance, legal status in the country of arrival or religion.

2. Create a safe learning environment where all pupils, their cultures, religions and identities are valued, and where pupils feel they have a common sense of belonging.

Scheduling Events

1. Reflect in the school calendar the religious diversity of the school population and the community.
2. Collaborate with local and faith communities that represent all religions of the pupils and the community.

School Breaks

Reflect in the school calendar the religious diversity of the school population and the community.

School Celebrations / Events / Activities

Reflect in the school calendar the religious diversity of the school population and the community.

School Projects

Collaborate with local and faith communities that represent all religions of the pupils and the community.

Pupil Support

1. Promote understanding of religious diversity and dialogue since respecting other religions is a common principle found in most faiths.
2. Implement a multi-religious systematic approach, by presenting all religions side by side without preferences of any kind.
3. Create a safe learning environment where all pupils, their cultures, religions and identities are valued, and where pupils feel they have a common sense of belonging.

Teacher Professional Development

1. Include opportunities in the curriculum for staff and pupils to study the issues raised by valuing religious diversity and faith.
2. Provide teachers with training opportunities on the challenges, the curriculum and the teaching approaches of religious education.

Timetabling

Reflect in the school calendar the religious diversity of the school population and the community.

Supportive literature

Definition: A minority religion is a religion held by a minority of the population of a country, state, or region. Minority religions may be subject to stigma or discrimination. An example of a stigma is using the term cult with its extremely negative connotations for certain new religious movements. People who belong to a minority religion may be subject to discrimination and prejudice, especially when the religious differences correlate with ethnic differences. Laws are made in some countries to protect the rights of religious minorities, such as protecting the minority culture, and to promote harmony with the majority.

Council of Europe definition: “Religion is a collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and worldviews that relate humanity to spirituality and, sometimes, to moral values. Many religions have narratives, symbols, traditions and sacred histories that are intended to give meaning to life or to explain the origin of life or the universe. They tend to derive morality, ethics, religious laws or a preferred lifestyle from their ideas about the cosmos and human nature. [...] Many religions have organised behaviours, clergy, a definition of what constitutes adherence or membership, congregations of laity, regular meetings or services for the purposes of veneration of a deity or for prayer, holy places (either natural or architectural), and/or scriptures. The practice of a religion may also include sermons, commemoration of the activities of a deities, sacrifices, festivals, feasts, trance, initiations, funerary services, matrimonial services, meditation, music, art, dance, public service, or other aspects of human culture. However, there are examples of religions for which some or many of these aspects of structure, belief, or practices are absent.”

Characteristics: Pupils belonging to religious minorities have a faith which is different from that held by the majority. Most countries of the world have religious minorities. It is now widely accepted in the west that people should have the freedom to choose their own religion, including not having any religion (atheism and/or agnosticism), and including the right to convert from one religion to another. However, in many countries this freedom is restricted.

Armenians

Definition: The origins of the Armenian Church date back to the 1st century. According to tradition, the Armenian Church was founded by two of the twelve apostles of Christ, St. Jude Thaddeus and St. Bartholomew, who preached Christianity in Armenia between the years 40 and 60 AD. Because of these founding apostles, the official name of the Armenian Church is Armenian Apostolic Church.

Food restrictions / Fasting: Orthodox Christians often fast on a regular basis. Fasting periods include most Wednesdays and Fridays, Lent, Advent / Nativity (five weeks before Christmas), Dormition/Assumption (1-15 August) and a variable period before the Feast of the Holy Apostles. There are other fast days as well. Dates can be determined by consulting an Orthodox liturgical calendar. During periods of fasting, Orthodox Christians refrain from eating animal products, including fish, chicken and dairy products. In rare cases, fish is allowed for a short period.

Special days:

- **Amanor (New Year, January 1):** This is one of the most popular and beloved public holidays marking the start of the year and celebrated for a whole week after the holiday.
- **Christmas (January 6):** Christmas is a religious holiday. It represents the birthday of Jesus Christ and is celebrated by Christian people all over the world. The Armenians celebrate this holiday with the Epiphany by attending churches, praying, and lighting candles, and celebrate these two holidays at once.
- **Sargis Holiday (February):** This is a beloved religious holiday and very popular among Armenians, particularly young people. Actually, like many other religious holidays and observations, there is no exact date for observing St. Sargis. It is usually celebrated on a Saturday 63 days before Easter (January 18 – February 23).
- **Trndez (Purification – February 14):** Trndez, literally meaning coming forward to the Lord, is also a religious custom, according to which the holiday is connected with the idea of coming closer to the Lord with fire. The celebration of Trndez has pagan origins and is connected with sun and fire worship in the ancient Armenia of pre-Christian period. Later, the Armenian Apostolic Church preserved this tradition, as it was very popular. Nowadays, Armenians celebrate it on February 14th, 40 days after Jesus's birth that is believed to be on January, 6th by Armenians.
- **Easter (April):** In the Christian world, Easter is considered to be among the most favorite and anticipated holidays. It is one of the greatest religious holidays of the Armenian Apostolic Church.
- **Hambardzum (Ascension Day – May):** Ascension Day is a religious holiday. It presents love and enjoyment; therefore, it is celebrated outdoors, usually in the blossom of May (40 days after Easter).
- **Grape Blessing Day (August):** This religious holiday is usually celebrated on the Sunday nearest to August 15th. The Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church blesses the grape harvest.
- **Khachverats (Holy Cross – September):** This is an official religious holiday, which is celebrated by the Armenian Church on the Sunday nearest to September 14th. It is devoted to Surb Khach, the Holy Cross. The Khachverats holiday also serves as a memorial to those who have passed away.

Maronites

Definition: A particular Catholic sui iuris Church, of the Eastern rite, in full communion with the Apostolic See, and that recognises the authority of the Pope, the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church. Its origin dates back to the community founded by Maron, a Syro-Syrian monk of the fourth century venerated as a saint. The first Maronite patriarch, St. John Maron, was elected at the end of the seventh century.

Food restrictions / Fasting: Maronites have many rules and restrictions regarding eating and drinking, for sample complete abstinence from tea, coffee and alcohol and an emphasis on wholesome eating.

Special days: Maronites celebrate the usual Christian holidays, such as Christmas (December 25), Easter (in March or April), the Feast of the Ascension (May 15), and the Feast of the Assumption (August 15). On the Festival of the Cross (September 14) Maronites set fires on high places all over Mount Lebanon and light candles at home and in churches. A special Maronite holy day is St.

Maron's Day (February 9), the feast of the Maronites' patron saint, St. John Maron, who lived in the fifth century AD.

Latins

Definition: Latins originally referred to an Italic tribe in the former center of Italy. As Roman power spread the Latin culture, Latinos came to mean anyone who lives in a Latinised culture and speaks Latin or a Romance language.

Food restrictions / Fasting: (Same as Catholic Christians).

Special days:

- Día de los Reyes Magos, Día de Reyes (Three Kings Day) – January 6
- Semana Santa (Holy Week) – The week that precedes Easter
- Feast of the Assumption – August 15
- The Feast of Saint Michael the Archangel and All the Angels – September 29
- Día de Todos los Santos (All Saints' Day) – November 1
- Día de los Difuntos or Day of the Dead (All Souls' Day) – November 2
- Nochebuena (Christmas Eve) – December 24

Navidad (Christmas Day) – December 25

Catholic Christians

Definition: Christianity is a monotheistic religion, based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, which serves as the focal point for the religion. It is the largest religion in the world, with more than 2.4 billion followers, or 33% of the global population. Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the saviour of humanity (Sara Diaz, 2012).

Food restrictions / Fasting: For most Christians, eating habits are not affected- though some will be vegetarians, usually for moral reasons, and some will refrain from eating meat on Fridays.

During Fridays of Lent, Catholics are expected to abstain from eating meat. On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, Catholics are asked to abstain from eating meat. The minimum fast is not to eat more than one full meal on a quick day. Two smaller meatless meals, equivalent to less than a full meal, are allowed to sustain physical strength. These standards apply to persons over the age of fourteen and apply only up to sixty years.

Special days:

The most important Christian holiday is [Easter](#), a spring holiday that celebrates Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Easter is immediately preceded by Holy Week, which includes [Palm Sunday](#), Maundy Thursday, and [Good Friday](#). The 40 days prior to Easter form the [Lenten season](#), a time of fasting and repentance.

Another holiday that has become important is [Christmas](#), which commemorates the birth of Jesus on December 25.

Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims

Shiite Muslims definition: The name “Sunni” is derived from the phrase “Ahl al-Sunnah”, or “People of the Tradition”. The tradition in this case refers to practices based on what the Prophet Muhammad said, did, agreed to or condemned. Sunni Muslims agree that the new leader should be elected from among those capable of the job. This is what was done, and the Prophet Muhammad's close friend and adviser, Abu Bakr, became the first Caliph of the Islamic nation. Sunni Muslims contend that leadership of the community is not a birthright, but a trust that is earned and which may be given or taken away by the people themselves. Sunni Muslims make up the majority (85%) of Muslims all over the world.

Islam (Sunni Muslims) definition: The origin of the term "Shiite" comes from the abbreviation of the expression "shīatu Ali," meaning "followers," "faction," or "party" of Ali (Ali was married to Fatima, daughter of Muhammad). Contrary to the Sunni Muslims, the Shiite Muslims believe that leadership should have stay within the Prophet's own family, among those specifically appointed by him, or among Imams appointed by God Himself. So they believe that following the Prophet Muhammad's death, leadership should have passed directly to his cousin/son-in-law, Ali bin Abu Talib. Significant populations of Shiite Muslims can be found in Iran and Iraq, and large minority communities in Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and Lebanon.

Special attire: Muslim women wear the hijab, which is a veil that covers the head and chest. The hijab is worn starting from the age of puberty in the presence of adult males other than those in the immediate family, as a form of modest attire.

Muslims food restrictions / fasting: The Muslim religion has various food restrictions according to dietary laws, which are Halaal. During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims are not allowed to eat from dawn to sunset. However young children, pregnant women and the sick are often exempted. As with to other religions, guests should ask about which restrictions apply to them.

- Carnivorous animals are not permitted;
- All pork and pork products are totally forbidden;
- Sea animals which do not have fins or scales are considered undesirable by some Muslims;
- Alcohol in any form is not permitted;
- Permissible meat other than pork can be eaten only if it is prepared in the correct way (Halaal);
- These products should be avoided by all Muslims: lard, gelatine, rennet, whey, vanilla extract;
- Utensils should be separate so that there is no contamination of Halaal and non-Halaal foods.

Special days:

- Ramadan - Each year, Muslims spend a month in daytime fasting, during the 9th month of the Islamic calendar called Ramadan.
- Laylat al-Qadr - Towards the end of Ramadan, Muslims observe the "Night of Power," which is when the first verses of the Quran were revealed to Muhammad.
- Eid al-Fitr - At the end of Ramadan, Muslims celebrate "The Festival of Fast-Breaking."
- Hajj - Each year during the 12th month of [the Islamic calendar](#), millions of Muslims make an annual pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia called *Hajj*.

- Day of Arafat - During one day of the Hajj, pilgrims gather at the Plain of Arafat to seek God's mercy, and Muslims elsewhere fast for the day.
- Eid al-Adha - At the end of the annual pilgrimage, Muslims celebrate "The Festival of Sacrifice."

Protestants

Definition / Characteristics: Protestantism is a branch of Christianity. The dividing lines of Christianity have been outlined as follows: Roman Catholicism, Eastern and Orthodox churches, and Protestantism. A. G. Mendonça observes that although the Church of England results from the Religious Reformation, it ended up being halfway between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Mendonça proposes the establishment of a fourth category, thus becoming the classification: Roman, Orthodox or Eastern, Protestant and Anglican.

The Protestant grouping, includes the the great Reform family: Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregations, and Baptists. The doctrines of protestant denominations vary, but many include justification by grace through faith alone – the bible as the only role in matters of faith and order, a doctrine known as sola scriptura.

Food restrictions/ Fasting: While individuals may choose to exercise self-control in the area of personal food consumption, religious dietary mandates are not part of the teachings of Protestantism.

Special Days:

- **Ascension Day** - The fortieth day after Easter
- **All Saints Day (November 1)** - Protestants celebrate the Protestant special saints
- **All Souls Day (November 2)** – Protestants remember their deceased
- **Evangelicalism Day (July 7)**
- **Christian Flag Day (September 26)**
- **National Day of Prayer (The first Thursday of May)** - This is an annual day of observance held on the first Thursday of May when people are asked "to turn to God in prayer and meditation".
- **Faith Day (The third Sunday in August)**
- **National Day of Repentance (The Thursday prior to Easter)** - Easter is when the sins of the World were shed by Jesus

Jews

Definition: The word "Jew" was originally used to refer to the children of Judah, son of Jacob, and later was designated to those born in Judea. After deliverance from the captivity of Babylon, the Hebrews began to be called Jews. Jews, also known as the Jewish people, form an ethno-religious group from the Israelites or Hebrews, from the ancient Near East. Jewish ethnicity, nationality and religion are strongly interrelated, as Judaism is the traditional faith of the Jewish nation.

Special Attire: Kippah (Yarmulke) Male pupils should wear a kippah, a round cap worn on the head, that is neat, clean, and contains no inappropriate words or symbols. Each boy should have an extra kippah at school.

Navy or khaki, flat or pleated front, uniform style pants, shorts, or skirts; Navy Blue with Light Navy Crest JDS; OR Navy Blue Crested Polo Light Blue Dress for Girls

Food restrictions / Fasting: Jewish dietary laws are known as Kashrut, and are among the most complex of all religious food practices. In this religion foods are divided into two categories: kosher (allowed) or trefa (forbidden). Characteristics of kosher foods include animals that have a completely split hoof and chew cud (such as cows, goats and sheep), while kosher fish must have fins and scales. In general all plant foods are kosher. In addition, a specific slaughtering process must be followed for meat to be considered kosher. Meat and dairy products must not be prepared, stored or eaten together and certain fasting days are observed (especially Yom Kippur).

Many Jewish people practice some or all of these restrictions in various degrees:

- No pork, and shellfish;
- Fish is acceptable as long as it has fins and scales;
- All animals with split hooves and which chew the cud (including sheep and cows) are acceptable;
- Refrain from eating meat and dairy products at the same meal;
- No wine, unless its kosher wine;
- All meat has to be prepared by a qualified kosher butcher (Shochet);
- If meat was eaten in the same day, one must wait six hours before consuming any dairy products.

Special days:

- **Rosh Hashanah ("beginning of the year")** - Is the Jewish New Year. It is the first of the High Holidays (Yamim Noraim - Days of Awe"). This Holiday is celebrated by lots of special [prayers](#) that Hashem (God) should grant a happy and healthy new year. On Rosh Hashanah there is a biblical commandment to blow or listen to the blowing of a Shofar, a horn of a ram.
- **Yom Kippur** - It is known as the "day of atonement". In this day, Jews from all walks of life stay in synagogue praying during most of the day. The bible commands all Jews to fast and refrain from wearing shoes, massaging and any sexual activity. Thus, Hashem will forgive for all the sins from the previous year.
- **Sukkoth** - is called "Zman Simchaseinu," the time of joy, in the Bible. The holiday is celebrated by eating and sleeping in a hut covered with branches and grass. The hut resembles the "clouds of glory" that the Jews traveled in, when they were in the desert for forty years before entering the land of Israel.
- **Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah** - In the Torah there is one additional day that Hashem (God) added to the holiday of Sukkoth. A special day, where Hashem asks the Jewish people to celebrate with him in a special feast. There is no special commandment for this holiday, only to sing and celebrate with Hashem. Throughout the generations, rabbinic sages added a new twist to this holiday: Simchat Torah. In this day the Jews complete their weekly Torah portion, and start again.
- **Hanukkah** – Hanukkah marks the defeat of Seleucid Empire forces that prevented the Jewish people from observing Judaism. The eight-day festival is marked by the kindling of lights - one on the first night, two on the second, and so on - using a special candle holder called a Chanukkiyah, or a Hanukkah menorah. It is celebrated with great joy and love.
- **Purim** - It is a very special and unique holiday introduced to Jews by Mordechai with Esther and the great sages of that time. Purim is a festival that commemorates the saving of the Jewish people living throughout the ancient Persian Empire from a plot by Haman to kill all men, women and children.
- **Passover** - It commemorates the story of the Jewish people when they were freed from Egyptian slavery. Passover begins on the 15th day of the month of Nisan, and is celebrated

for eight days (seven in Israel). This is the time when Jews celebrate the great miracles God has brought upon the Egyptians in the form of ten plagues and later by drowning the Egyptians in the red sea. It is celebrated by not eating any bread or leaven.

- **Shavuot** - Shavuot is celebrated on the sixth day of the Hebrew month of Sivan. It marks the great Sinai revelation when Hashem gave the Torah or the bible for the Jewish people. This holiday lasts two days (only one in Israel), and has no special biblical commandments besides refraining from work.
- **Tu B'Shvat** - The fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of Shvat is celebrated by eating fruits. This is the start of blossoming of the trees.
- **Lag Be'Omer** - Lag Be'Omer is celebrated on the eighteenth day of the month of Iyar, the thirty third day of the counting of the Omer. On this day the great sage R' Shimon Bar Yochai passed away and it is celebrated by lighting large bonfires, and going to his gravesite in Miron, Israel.

Pomaks

Definition: Pomaks (Bulgarian: Помаци / Pomatsi, Greek: Πομάκοι / Pomákoι, Turkish: Pomaklar) is a term used for Muslim Slavs that inhabit Bulgaria, Northeast Greece and northwestern Turkey, referring mainly to ca. 220,000 strong [9] confessional minority in Bulgaria officially known as Bulgarian Muslims. The term has also been used more broadly to include the Slav Muslim populations of the Republic of Macedonia and Albania. The Bulgarian dialect spoken by the pomaks in Greece and Turkey is known there as the Pomak language.

Special days:

- Ramadan - Each year, Muslims spend a month in daytime fasting, during the 9th month of the Islamic calendar called Ramadan.
- Laylat al-Qadr - Towards the end of Ramadan, Muslims observe the "Night of Power," which is when the first verses of the Quran were revealed to Muhammad.
- Eid al-Fitr - At the end of Ramadan, Muslims celebrate "The Festival of Fast-Breaking."
- Hajj - Each year during the 12th month of [the Islamic calendar](#), millions of Muslims make an annual pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia called Hajj.
- Day of Arafat - During one day of the Hajj, pilgrims gather at the Plain of Arafat to seek God's mercy, and Muslims elsewhere fast for the day.
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Buddhists

Definition: From the standpoint of classical Buddhist doctrine, the word "buddha" denotes not only a religious master who lived in a particular time, but a whole category of enlightened beings who have attained such spiritual realisation.

Buddhism recognises three types of Buddha, among which the term Buddha is usually reserved for the first type, the Samyaksam-buddha. The realisation of nirvana is exactly the same in all three types of buddha, but one Samyaksam-buddha expresses more qualities and capabilities than the other two types of buddha.

Among the world religions (most of which proclaim the existence of a creator God), Buddhism is considered unusual because it is a non-theistic religion. For the Buddha the key to liberation is purity

of mind and right understanding, and for this reason he rejected the notion that salvation is won by begging for a distant deity.

Buddhism is a philosophical or non-theistic religion that encompasses various traditions, beliefs and practices generally based on the Buddha's teachings. It encompasses schools like Theravada, Zen, Pure Land and Tibetan Buddhism, spread farther into Tibet, China and Japan. Various sources put the number of Buddhists in the world between 230 million and 500 million, making it the fifth largest religion in the world.

Buddhist schools vary on the exact nature of the path of liberation, the importance and canonicity of various teachings and especially their practices. However, the basis of traditions and practices are the Three Jewels: The Buddha (as his master), Dharma (teachings based on the laws of the universe) and the Sangha (the Buddhist community).

Food restrictions / Fasting: Buddhism considers living beings to be sacred, a belief that has translated into widely practiced vegetarianism and veganism. Violence towards animals is considered to translate into human aggression; hence most Buddhists will keep to the principle of ahimsa (non-violence or harmlessness) and avoid all foods related to processes where harm was done. Some Buddhists avoid meat and dairy products while others avoid only meat. Buddhists also avoid the consumption of alcohol. Monks of this religion fast in the afternoon and rely on 'alms' or donations of food as they, along with Buddhist nuns, are not allowed to cultivate, store or cook their own food (Sara Diaz, 2012).

Special days:

- **Buddhist New Year** - The Buddhist New Year is celebrated on different days throughout the world. In Theravadin countries, the new year is celebrated for three days from the first full moon day in April. In Mahayana countries, the new year usually starts on the first full moon day in January, and Tibetan Buddhists generally celebrate it in March.
- **Vesak (Buddha Day)** - Vesak is the birthday of the Buddha and the most important festival in Buddhism. On the first full moon day in May, Buddhists all over the world celebrate the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha in a single day. The name "Vesak" comes from the Indian month of that name in which it is held.
- **Sangha Day (Magha Puja Day or Fourfold Assembly Day)** - Sangha Day commemorates the Buddha's visit to Veruvana Monastery in the city of Rajagaha, when 1,250 arhats are said to have spontaneously returned from their wanderings to pay their respects to the Buddha. Sangha Day is celebrated on the full moon day of the third lunar month (March).
- **Dhamma Day (Asalha Puja Day)** - Dhamma Day is observed on the full moon day of the eighth lunar month (July). It commemorates the "turning of the wheel of the Dharma" - the Buddha's first sermon - at the Sarnath Deer Park.
- **Observance Day (Uposatha)** - Observance Day refers to each of the four traditional monthly holy days that continue to be observed in Theravada countries - the new moon, full moon, and quarter moon days.
- **Kathina Ceremony (Robe Offering Ceremony)** - The Kathina Ceremony is held on any convenient date within one month of the conclusion of the three-month rains retreat season (Vassa). On this day, the laity (non-monastics) offer new robes and other necessities to the monks and nuns.
- **Festival of Floating Bowls (Loy Krathong)** - At the end of the Kathin Festival season, when the rivers and canals are full of water, the Loy Krathong Festival takes place in all parts of Thailand on the full moon night of the twelfth lunar month. People bring bowls made of leaves (which contain flowers), candles and incense sticks, and float them in the water. As they go, all bad luck is supposed to disappear. The traditional practice of Loy Krathong was

originally meant to pay homage to the holy footprint of the Buddha on the beach of the Namada River in India.

- **Elephant Festival** - The Buddha used the example of a wild elephant that is harnessed to a tame one to teach that a person new to Buddhism should be helped by an older Buddhist. To mark this saying, Thai Buddhists hold an Elephant Festival on the third Saturday in November.
- **The Festival of the Tooth** - On a small hill in Sri Lanka is a great temple that was built to house a relic of the Buddha - his tooth. The tooth can never be seen, as it is kept deep inside many caskets. But once a year in August, on the night of the full moon, there is a special procession for it.
- **Ancestor Day (Ulambana)** - In Mahayana countries, it is believed that the gates of hell are opened on the first day of the eighth lunar month and ghosts may visit the world for 15 days. Food offerings are made during this time to relieve the sufferings of the ghosts. On the fifteenth day, Ulambana or Ancestor Day, people visit cemeteries to make offerings to their departed ancestors.

Hindu

Definition: McDaniel (2007) classifies Hinduism into six major types and numerous smaller types in order to understand the expression of emotions among Hindus. The main types, according to McDaniel are, Folk Hinduism, which is based on local traditions and cults of local deities and is the oldest, non-literate system; Vedic Hinduism, which is based on the earliest strata of the Vedas traced to the second millennium BC; Vedantic Hinduism, which is based on the philosophy of the Upanishads, including Advaita Vedanta, emphasising knowledge and wisdom; Yogic Hinduism, following the text of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras emphasising introspective awareness; Dharmic Hinduism or "daily morality," which McDaniel claims to be stereotyped in some books as the "only form of Hindu religion with a belief in karma, cows and caste"; and Bhakti or devotion to Hinduism, where intense emotions are elaborately embodied in the pursuit of the spiritual.

Food restrictions / Fasting: Hinduism is one of the most ancient religions in the world and, although meat was not originally prohibited, many Hindus today regard vegetarianism as a way to maintain the respect observed for life. Hinduism is characterised by the avoidance of the killing of any animal, the cleansing of those involved in food preparation, which is a reflection on previously existing caste-restricted practices, and the symbolism of certain foods. The cow is held in high regard as a symbol of abundance and so it is not eaten by Hindus, yet products such as milk, butter and yogurt may be eaten. Some Hindus fast on selected days as a mark of respect to certain gods. Most Hindus adopt a lactovegetarian diet without meat, poultry, fish or eggs. Dairy products are allowed (Sara Diaz, 2012).

Special days:

- **Holi** (also called Holaka or Phagwa) - is an annual festival celebrated on the day after the full moon in the Hindu month of Phalguna (early March). It celebrates spring, commemorates various events in Hindu mythology and is a time of disregarding social norms and indulging in general merrymaking.
- **Diwali**, from the Sanskrit word Dīpāvali, meaning "row of lights" is a Hindu festival of lights lasting five days. For many Hindus, Diwali is also New Year's Eve. Diwali is held on the final day of the Vikram calendar, a type of Hindu calendar followed by North Indians.

- **Mahashivaratri** (also called Shiva Ratri) is the Great Festival of Shiva. It is held on the 14th day of the dark half of the lunar month of Phalguna. Mahashivaratri is especially important to Saivites (devotees of Shiva), but it is celebrated by most Hindus.

Neo-paganists

Definition: Neopaganism is a term used to identify a wide variety of modern religious movements, particularly those influenced by the pre-Christian pagan beliefs of Europe. Neo-pagan religious movements are extremely diverse, with a wide range of beliefs, including polytheism, animism, pantheism, and other paradigms. Many Neopagans practice a spirituality that is completely modern in its origin, while others try to reconstruct precisely or to revive old religions as they are found in historical and folkloric sources.

Most neo-pagan religions are attempts at reconstruction, resurgence or - more commonly - adaptation of old pagan religions, especially those of pre-Christian European antiquity, but not restricted to them, without losing sight of the experiences and needs presented by the contemporary world.

Neopaganism is mainly present in developed countries, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom, but also in continental Europe (German-speaking Europe, Scandinavia, Slavic Europe, Latin Europe and other European countries) and Canada. The largest neo-pagan religion is Wicca, although there were other Neopagan groups of significant size, such as Neodruidism, Ásatrú (Germanic Neopaganism) and Slavic Neopaganism.

Fasting/ Food restriction: There are no days formally devoted to fasting, but some fast in the preparation of the festival of Ostara (Spring Equinox). At the discretion of the individual - some totally avoid food, others reduce the amount of food. The goal is to purify the person energetically; Ostara fasting is used for personal cleansing of heavy winter foods.

Special days:

Wiccans and other Neo-pagans celebrate holidays and festivals based on nature and the changing of seasons. The Neo-pagan seasonal cycle, called the Wheel of the Year, consists of eight major Sabbats. The Sabbats are joyous occasions of celebration and festivity.

Like Jewish Shabbats, Neopagan Sabbats begin at sunset the day before the holiday. Four of the Sabbats, known as cross-quarter days, have Celtic origins and are called by their Celtic names. The other four mark important points on the solar calendar.

The eight Sabbats are:

- **Imbolc** - February 2
- **Ostara (Spring Equinox)** - March 21
- **Beltane** - May 1
- **Midsummer (Summer Solstice)** - June 22
- **Lughnasadh** - August 2
- **Mabon (Autumn Equinox)** - September 21
- **Samhain** - November 1
- **Yule (Winter Solstice)** - December 21

Irreligion

Definition: Irreligion is the absence, indifference, rejection or hostility towards religion.

When characterised as the rejection of religious belief, irreligion encompasses atheism, agnosticism, deism, religious dissent and secular humanism. When characterised as the absence of religious belief, it may also include "spiritual but not religious", pandeism, ignoreism, nontheism, pantheism, panentheism, and free thought. When characterised as indifference to religion, it is known as apatheism. When characterised as hostility against religion, which encompasses antitheism, antireligion and misotheism.

Irreligion may include some forms of theism, depending on the religious context it is set against.

Food restrictions / Fasting

No fasting traditions have been identified among irreligious groups.

Special days:

No special days have been identified in irreligious groups.

Greek / Christian Orthodox

Definition: The name Greek Orthodox Church, or Greek Orthodoxy, is a term referring to the body of several Churches within the larger communion of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, whose liturgy is or was traditionally conducted in Koine Greek, the original language of the New Testament, and whose history, traditions, and theology are rooted in the early Church Fathers and the culture of the Byzantine Empire. Greek Orthodox Christianity has also traditionally placed heavy emphasis and awarded high prestige to traditions of Christian monasticism and asceticism, with origins in Early Christianity in the Near East and in Byzantine Anatolia.

The Orthodox Church throughout the ages has maintained a continuity of faith and love with the apostolic community, which was founded by Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit. Orthodoxy believes that she has preserved and taught the historic Christian Faith, free from error and distortion, from the time of the Apostles. She also believes that there is nothing in the body of her teachings which is contrary to truth or which inhibits real union with God. The air of antiquity and timelessness which often characterises Eastern Christianity is an expression of her desire to remain loyal to the authentic Christian Faith.

Orthodoxy believes that the Christian Faith and the Church are inseparable. It is impossible to know Christ, to share in the life of the Holy Trinity, or to be considered a Christian, apart from the Church. It is in the Church that the Christian Faith is proclaimed.

Food restrictions / Fasting: Fasting periods include most Wednesdays and Fridays, Lent, Advent / Nativity (five weeks before Christmas), Dormition/ Assumption (1-15 August) and a variable period before the Feast of the Holy Apostles. There are other fast days as well. During periods of fasting, Orthodox Christians refrain from eating animal products, including fish, chicken and dairy products. In rare cases, fish is allowed.

Special days:

- **New Year's Day "Protochronia"** (January 1) – Following a morning church ceremony presents are exchanged, and there is singing, dancing, and feasting. A special cake, called a *vassilopita*, is baked with a coin inside. The person who eats the piece with the coin will have a year of good luck. The traditional New Year greeting is "Kali Chronia."
- **Epiphany "Agia Theofania"** (January 6) – Epiphany is the celebration of the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. The day is marked by blessing the waters. Rivers, lakes and oceans are

blessed and crosses immersed in them. The largest celebration is in Piraeus where a cross is thrown into the sea and young men dive to retrieve it.

- **Feast of the Annunciation** (March 25) – is the Christian celebration of the announcement by the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary that she would conceive and become the mother of Jesus <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus>, the Son of God, marking his Incarnation. The Feast of the Annunciation is one of the twelve “Great Feasts” of the liturgical year, and is among the eight of them that are counted as “feasts of the Lord”.
- **Ash/Shrove/Clean Monday (Koulouma) “Kathari Deftera”** (40 days after Easter) – On Ash Monday, it is traditional to go the countryside for picnics, fly kites and begin fasting for Easter by eating Lenten food.
- **Holy Good Friday “Megali Paraskevi” “Epitaphios” Lamentations** - The festivities begin on Good Friday with *perifora epitaphios*, a candlelit procession of a shrouded funeral bier that is carried through the city streets to the local church. Every major city and tiny town in Greece has their own procession, although the most impressive one takes place in Athens where the procession climbs Lykabettus to the Chapel of Agios Georgios.
- **Holy Good Saturday The Resurrection ' Megalo Savvato'** - On Holy Saturday there is a Resurrection Mass at 11 p.m. followed at midnight by darkness symbolising Jesus passing through the underworld, and finally by fireworks and a candlelight procession through the streets, symbolising Jesus's resurrection. The Lent fast is broken by eating red-dyed eggs and *mageiritsa* soup.
- **Holy Easter Sunday ' Kyriaki tou Pascha'** – Easter Sunday is spent with the family, singing, dancing, and feasting on roast lamb and dyed red eggs.
- **Whit Monday 'Agiou Pnevma'** - Fifty days after Easter. This religious holiday marks the descent of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. It is celebrated with church services decorated with pennants. Greeks use this holiday to go away for a long weekend, usually to the Greek islands.
- **Assumption of the Virgin 'Apokimisis tis Panagias'** (August 15) - Assumption Day falls within the traditional Greek vacation month when people are normally on the move. So typically crowded ferries and buses become even more packed near the holiday as people travel to be near their families. This is the largest celebration of the Holy Virgin Mary in Greece. The island of Tinos is a major pilgrimage destination where thousands go to be blessed, healed or baptised.
- **Christmas 'Christougenna'** (December 25) - Although less important than Easter in the Greek Orthodox religion, Christmas is celebrated with religious services & feasting.

Rastafarians

Definition: A religion with deep political convictions, Rastafarianism began in the slums of Jamaica in the 1920s and 1930s. African religious tradition strongly influenced the Rastafarian culture and biblical themes heavily influenced the belief system of this religion. The most famous Rastafari is undoubtedly Bob Marley, whose reggae music gained international recognition of the Jamaican movement.

There is no formal and organised leadership in Rastafarianism, creating a wide variety of spiritual and moral variations within the religion. Some Rastafarians see it more as a way of life, and others see it more as a religion. Yet to unite diversity within the movement is the belief in the divinity and / or messianism of the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie I, the influence of Jamaican culture, the resistance of oppression and pride in African heritage.

The Rastafarian lifestyle usually includes the ritual use of marijuana, the avoidance of alcohol, wearing hair in dreadlocks and vegetarianism.

Food restrictions / Fasting: Some Rastafarians eat Ital food. Meat may or may not be a part of the individual's diet. Fish, however, is a staple of Ital food. As a result, many Rastafarians are vegetarians (Sara Diaz, 2012).

Special days:

- **Ethiopian Christmas Day** – Rastafarian people believe in the principals of Christianity. They also find spiritual connection to the land of Ethiopia, and have been intertwined with the country's culture right from 330 A.D. As such they celebrate Christmas, but as per the traditional Ethiopian calendar. On this day people pray and also abstain from eating meat.
- **Grounation Day** – The Rastafarians believe that this is the day when Emperor Haile Selassie I visited the country of Jamaica in the year 1966. They believe Emperor Haile Selassie I to be the manifestation of God on Earth whose mission was to save humankind by bringing amongst them the gospels of peace and unity. As such this is a joyous occasion for Rastafarians and they commemorate it with music, dance and prayers.
- **Ethiopian New Year's Day** – Rastafarians all around the world consider Ethiopia to be their spiritual motherland and view the history and traditions of the country with much reverence. Consequently they celebrate New Year's day as per Ethiopian tradition.

Sikh

Definition: A **Sikh** is a follower of Sikhism, a monotheistic religion, which originated during the 15th century in the Punjab region of northern South Asia. The term "Sikh" has its origin in the Sanskrit words (disciple, student) or (instruction). A Sikh, according to Article I of the Sikh Rehat Maryada, is "any human being who faithfully believes in One Immortal Being; ten Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh; Guru Granth Sahib; the teachings of the ten Gurus and the baptism bequeathed by the tenth Guru".

"Sikh" refers to adherents of Sikhism as a religion, not an ethnic group. However, because Sikhism has seldom sought converts, most Sikhs share strong ethno-religious ties. Many countries, such as the United Kingdom, therefore recognise Sikh as a designated ethnicity on their censuses.^[21] The American non-profit organisation United Sikhs has fought to have Sikh included on the U.S. census as well, arguing that Sikhs "self-identify as an 'ethnic group'" and believe "that they are more than just a religion".

Male Sikhs have "Singh" (Lion), and female Sikhs have "Kaur" (princess) as their middle or last name. Sikhs who have undergone the *khande-kī-pahul* (the Sikh initiation ceremony) may also be recognised by the five Ks: *Kesh*, uncut hair which is kept covered, usually by a turban; *kara*, an iron or steel bracelet; a *kirpan*, a sword tucked into a *gatra* strap or a *kamal kasar* belt; *kachehra*, a cotton undergarment; and *kanga*, a small wooden comb. Initiated male and female Sikhs must cover their hair with a turban. The greater Punjab region is the historic homeland of the Sikhs, although significant communities exist around the world.

Food restrictions / Fasting: In Sikhism, only lacto-vegetarian food is served in the Gurdwara (Sikh temple) but Sikhs are not bound to be meat-free. The general consensus is that Sikhs are free to choose whether to adopt a meat diet or not. Sikhs, once they become Amritdhari (baptised) via the Amrit Sanskar (baptism ceremony), are forbidden from eating Kutha or ritually-slaughtered meat because it transgresses one of the four restrictions in the Sikh Code of Conduct.

Alcohol, tobacco and all narcotic or intoxicating drugs are banned substances for Sikhs.

Fasting may apply only to older Sikhs or those from rural areas. Although the Gurus did not specifically call for their followers to fast at any particular point, some older Sikhs like to fast during the full moon or during certain holidays. They say that this helps them to concentrate the mind on what is holy.

Special days:

- Maghi (January 14) - Maghi commemorates the martyrdom of the "Forty Immortals," forty followers of Guru Gobind Singh who had previously deserted him, fought bravely against overwhelming Mughal army forces and were martyred in Muktsar. Guru Gobind Singh blessed them as having achieved mukti (liberation) and cremated them at Muktsar. On Maghi, Sikhs visit gurdwaras and listen to kirtan (hymns). Naturally, the largest gathering is at Muktsar where an annual fair is held.
- Hola Maholla (March 26) - Hola (or Holla) Maholla is a mela celebrated in Anandpur on the Indian festival of Holi in memory of Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru instituted this day for military exercises and mock battles, followed by music and poetry contests. The holiday is still celebrated with mock battles and displays of horsemanship and skills with the sword. There are also processions with the Sikh flag and the Guru Granth Sahib.
- Vaisakhi (April 14) - Vaisakhi, in April, began as a Hindu festival of thanksgiving but for Sikhs, marks the founding of the Khalsa in 1699. Those ready to be initiated into the Khalsa are usually baptised on this day.
- Celebration of the Guru Granth Sahib (September) - This festival is celebrated in August or September.
- Diwali (Date varies) - Diwali is a Hindu festival of lights that was appropriated by the Sikhs to celebrate the release from prison of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, from prison in 1619. The Golden Temple was illuminated with lights to welcome the Guru home, and Sikhs continue this tradition by lighting lamps on Diwali each year. The Golden Temple is illuminated with thousands of lights.

Useful Websites

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