KNOWING CULTURE: CULTURAL COMPETENCE ACROSS HEALTHCARE AND RESEARCH – TOOLKIT

The Centre for Ethnic Health Research

Major World Religions and Beliefs

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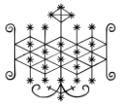
Religion	Symbol	Origin	Beliefs	Religious Place / Holy Book	Major Holy Days / Festivals	Subdivisions & Close Relations	Numbers
Atheism		650-500 BCE	• A lack of belief in God or gods, considering them to be human-made constructs. • Rejects religious belief. • Each subdivision or close relation believes different things. For example, humanists believe in the importance of reason and of the concept of humanity.	None	None	• Agnostic Atheism • Humanism • Implicit/Explicit • Positive/Negative • Postmodernism • Rationalism • Secularism	22,162,062 [1] (England and Wales, Census 2021)

[1] Based on those who stated 'No Religion' in the Census 2021.

Bahá'í		1844 CE	• Monotheistic. • Oneness of God, religion and humanity. • Freedom from, and elimination of, prejudice. • Equality between men and women. • Harmony between religion and science and the striving for truth. • Global peace and the centrality of justice. • Development of the spiritual being. • Integration of worship and service. • Importance of education. • The joining together and development of individuals, communities and institutions.	House of Worship / Local Centre Kitáb-i-Aqdas (or Aqdas)	• 19 Day Fast • Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh • Birth of the Báb • Day of the Covenant • Declaration of the Báb • Martyrdom of the Báb • Naw-Rúz • Ridván	None	4,725 (England and Wales, Census 2021)
Buddhism		Late 6th Century BCE	• Monotheistic • Four noble truths: 1) that existence is suffering; 2) that suffering has a cause; 3) that suffering ceases (nirvana); and 4) that there is a path (the 'eightfold path') towards the end of suffering and Enlightenment. • The path follows that of Buddha and involves the individual practice of morality, meditation and wisdom.	Temple (Vihara, Chaitya, Stupa, Wat, Pagoda) Tripitaka	• Asalha Puja • Bodhi Day • Buddha's Birthday • Kathina • Losar • Magha Puja • Parinirvana Day • Songkran • Ullambana • Vesak	• Mahayana Buddhism • Nichiren Buddhism • Pure Land Buddhism • Theravada Buddhism • Tibetan Buddhism • Zen Buddhism	272,508 (England and Wales, Census 2021) Around 9-10% of the world's population

Candomblé		1548-1888 CE	• Monotheistic. Believes in one God called Oludumaré, served by so-called lesser deities called 'orixas'. • Candomblé (which means 'dance in honour of the gods') is a mixture of traditional African (Yoruba, Fon and Bantu) beliefs brought to Brazil during the slave trade, and features of the Catholic tradition. • Music and dance are an important element of Candomblé practice. • Believes in destiny and in people following their own path guided by their own individual orixa.	Temple (Terreiro) Oral tradition (no holy texts)	• Olugbajé • Washing of Bonfim • Yemanja	• Candomblé Bantu • Candomblé Jejé • Candomblé Ketu	2-3 million worldwide (biggest community is in Brazil)
Christianity		30 CE	• Monotheistic. Belief in the Holy Trinity of God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son (being the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament) and the Holy Spirit. • Christianity is an Abrahamic faith with close ties to Judaism and Islam. • Follows the life, principles, guidance and instruction of Jesus Christ. • Believes that through prayer, worship and the living of faith, people have a personal relationship with God. • Belief in the Ten Commandments. • Uses (in the Catholic tradition) the inspiration and involvement (intervention) of Saints. • Catholics also believe in the religious authority of the Pope.	Church / Chapel / Cathedral Bible	• Advent • All Saints Day • Ascension Day • Christmas • Easter • Epiphany • Lent • Pentecost • Saint Days	• Anglicanism • Baptist • Christadelphian • Church of England • Eastern Catholicism • Eastern Orthodox • Episcopal • Lutheran • Methodism • Pentecostalism • Presbyterianism • Protestantism • Reformed Church • Roman Catholicism • Seventh-Day Adventists	27,522,672 (England and Wales, Census 2021) Around 2.4 billion people worldwide

Hinduism		2300 – 1500 BCE	• Polytheistic, but believes in the supreme being that is Brahman. Brahman takes the form of other deities, who are worshipped in their own right. • Hindus believe in four aspects, goals or aims of human life: 1) Dharma (righteousness, ethics, virtuous behaviour in accordance with the 'right way of living'); 2) Artha (livelihood, wealth); 3) Kāma (sensual pleasure); and 4) Mokṣa (liberation from suffering). • Hindus also believe in the importance of Karma as it impacts on reincarnation of the soul. • Close links historically and geographically with Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.	Temple (Mandir) Vedas, Upinashads (sacred texts)	• Diwali • Dussera • Ganesha Chaturthi • Holi • Krishna Janmashtami • Maha Shivratri • Makar Sankranti • Navratri • Raksha Bandhan • Vasant Panchami	• Shaivism • Shaktism • Smartism • Vaishnavism (Hare Krishna) • Ganapatism • Indonesian Hinduism • Kaumaram • Shrautism • Slavic Vedism or Neo-Vedism • Suryaism / Saurism	1,032,775 (England and Wales, Census 2021) The number of Hindus in the world is projected to rise to some 1.4 billion people in 2050
Islam		610 CE	• Monotheistic. • The last (historically) of the Abrahamic faiths. • Muslims have six core beliefs: 1) in Allah, the one and only God; 2) in angels; 3) in the holy books; 4) in the prophets, of whom Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the final one; 5) in the Day of Judgement; and 6) in Predestination, that although people have personal choice, Allah knows what will happen. • The way to Allah is through prayer and the recitation of the Qur'an. • Islam also has Five Pillars: 1) Shahadah (the Declaration of faith); 2) Salat (prayer); 3) Zakat (charity); 4) Sawn (fasting); and 5) Hajj (pilgrimage).	Mosque (Masjid) Qur'an	• Al-Hijra (New Year) • Eid-ul-Adha • Eid-ul-Fitr • Hajj (Pilgrimage) • Prophet's Birthday (Mawlid-an-Nabī) • Ramadan	• Shia • Sunni • African/American movements • Ahmadiyya • Gülen/Hizmet • Islamism • Liberal Muslims • Mahdavia • Quranism • Salafism • Schools of Islamic Theology • Sufism • Wahhabism • Zahirism	3,868,133 (England and Wales, Census 2021) 1.9 billion people across the world are Muslim (the world's fastest growing religion)

Jainism		7th to 5th Century BCE	• Jainism shares many concepts in common with Buddhism and Hinduism, including the existence of Karma and the reality of reincarnation. Jainism doesn't interpret things in the same way, however. • Jains believe in the existence of gods, but don't acknowledge their centrality in faith. • Jains believe that people have individual control, that the way to live a life is through personal example, by being harmless and non-violent, practicing self-denial and being disciplined. Ultimately, the goal of life is the liberation of the soul.	Temple (Derasar, Basadi) Agams or Agam Sutras (sacred books)	• Diwali • Kartak Purnima • Mahavira Jayanti • Mauna Agyaras • Paryushana	• Digambara • Svetambara	25,100 (England and Wales Census 2021) Leicester is a Centre of Jainism in the UK
Jehovah's Witnesses		1870s CE	• Monotheistic. Believe in the one Almighty God, the Creator called Jehovah, and his Son, Jesus Christ, whose teachings JW's follow as an example. • JW's also believe in 1) the Bible, its message and its lessons; 2) the Kingdom of God in heaven; 3) Salvation, health, resurrection and everlasting life through baptism, faith and obedience; 4) the existence of evil and suffering; 5) the importance of human conduct, of family, community and worship.	Kingdom Hall Bible (New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures)	Memorial of Christ's Death	None	130,000 (UK) Roughly 8.5 million worldwide

Judaism		1812 BCE	• Monotheistic, a belief in one transcendent God who revealed Himself to Abraham, Moses and the other Hebrew prophets. • The original Abrahamic faith. • Jews believe in a Covenant between themselves and God, that that necessitates setting a personal and collective example to the world as a way to fulfilling God's instruction, e.g. through the Ten Commandments. • Accordingly, Jews emphasise the importance of living one's faith, of it being a question of what you do that matters. • Jews tend to focus on the importance of family (traditions, customs, rituals) and community as concepts of togetherness.	Synagogue / Shul TANAKH (Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim), Talmud	• 10th of Tevet • 17th of Tammuz • Hanukkah • Pesach (Passover) • Purim • Rosh Hashanah (New Year) • Shavuot • Sukkot • Tisha B'Av • Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) • Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)	• Conservative • Hasidic • Liberal / Progressive / Reform • Orthodox • Reconstructionist • Ashkenazim • Sephardim • Dati • Haredi • Hiloni • Masorti	271,327 (England and Wales, Census 2021) As of 2023, the world's core Jewish population was estimated at 15.7 million (around 0.2% of the 8 billion worldwide population)
Mormonism		1820s CE	• Monotheistic. A belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ his Son and the Holy Spirit. • The central concepts of Mormonism are laid out in the Articles of Faith, a list of thirteen principles and beliefs. Among these are 1) obedience to the laws and decrees of Christ's Gospel; 2) the importance of baptism and repentance; 3) that people can worship God as and how they wish; and 4) the reality of the second coming of Jesus Christ, upon which Zion, the Promised Land, will be created.	Church / Meeting House / Temple Bible (King James Version) / Book of Mormon	• Christmas • Easter • Pioneer Day	• Apostolic United Brethren • Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints • Church of Jesus Christ with the Elijah Message • Community of Christ • The Church of Jesus Christ (Bickertonite)	186,933 (UK)

Paganism		10,000 BCE	• Polytheistic. • Each tradition has its own particular beliefs and practices. They look at the ancient religions of Europe and the Middle East as examples of continuity and of development. • Pagans are eclectic, using a wide variety of sources and beliefs as a basis for worship and for practical living. • There is a strong emphasis on nature and the natural world as sacred entities, on the Divine Feminine, living in the here and now, and of opposition to racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. • Pagans focus on the 'Wheel of the Year' and of the importance of season.	Nature / Stone Circles / Parks / Woods / Caves / Hilltops	• Beltane • Imbolc (Candlemas) • Litha (Summer Solstice) • Lughnasadh • Mabon (Autumn Equinox) • Ostara (Spring Equinox) • Samhain • Yule (Winter Solstice)	• Animism • Druid • Goddess Movement • Heathen • Occult • Pagan • Pantheism • Reconstructionist • Sacred Ecologists • Shamanism • Thelemite • Wicca • Witchcraft	126,980 (England, Census 2021)
Rastafari		1930s CE	• Monotheistic, a belief in the God of the Jews and Christians, whom they call Jah. Rastafarians also believe that Christ came to Earth as a divine manifestation of Jah. • Rastafarians believe Christ was a black African. Others also believe in the divinity of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia (considered to be the holy land). • There is a firm belief in the teachings of the Bible, but also that its meaning has been distorted, leading to the writing and use of the Holy Piby. • Rastafarianism has many things in common with Judaism and Christianity. Its origins are also firmly rooted within Black empowerment.	Home / Community Centre Holy Piby (The Black Man's Bible) / King James Bible	• Birthday of Emperor Haile Selassie • Crowning of Emperor Haile Selassie • Ethiopian Constitution Day • Ethiopian New Year's Day • Grounation Day • Marcus Garvey's Birthday • Christmas is celebrated on 7th January	• Nyabinghi Order • The Bobo Shanti • The Twelve Tribes of Israel • African Unity • Covenant Rastafari • Messianic Dreads • Selassian Church	6,000 England and Wales, Census 2021) Approx. 1 million worldwide (the biggest population is in Jamaica)

Santeria		17th Century CE	• Similar to Candomblé, Santeria is syncretic, deriving from a fusion of African (Yoruba) beliefs and traditions and elements of Roman Catholicism. • Santeria followers also believe in one God as the creator, and that his creation, the world, is cared for by lesser deities, the 'orishas'. • It is African-Caribbean in origin, growing out of the slave trade in Cuba. • Santeria means 'way of the Saints'.	Hall / Home	• Feast Days of Catholic Saints • Orisha Birthdays • Vodun Holidays	• Candomblé Queto • Ifá	Unknown (wide divergence of figures) Centre of Santeria is Cuba
Shinto		4th Century BCE – 700 CE	• Polytheistic. Followers of Shinto believe in the 'Kami', sacred, spiritual essences or 'holy powers' that exist in nature and human beings, even in the deceased. • The most important Kami is the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. • Shinto is an ancient Japanese religion, closely tied with Japanese culture. • Shinto literally means 'the way of the gods'. • Shinto belief has four 'affirmations': 1) tradition and family; 2) love of nature (seen as sacred); 3) personal and physical cleanliness; and 4) 'Matsuri' (the worship of and honour given to Kami).	Shrine Kojiki (Records of Ancient Matters) / Nihon-gi (Chronicles of Japan)	• Aki Matsuri (Autumn Festivals) • Haru Matsuri (Spring Festivals) • Oshogatsu (New Year) • Rei-sai • Seijin Shiki (Adults Day) • Setsubun • Shichigosan • Toshi-goi-no-Matsuri (Yakuyoke Festival)	• Folk Shinto • Sect Shinto • Shrine Shinto • State Shinto • Fusokyô • Izumo Oyashirokyô • Jikkokyô • Konkokyô • Kurozumikyô • Misogikyô • Ontakekyô • Shinrikyô • Shinshukyô • Shinto Shusei-ha • Shinto Taikyô • Taiseikyô • Tenrikyô	Around 104 million worldwide Centre of Shinto is in Japan. In 2021, around 48.6% of the total population of Japan participated in Shinto practices

Sikhism		1500 CE	• Monotheistic. Sikhs believe that 'God is One' and prevails everywhere and in everything. • Sikh beliefs are contained in the holy scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, and include the following: 1) faith and meditation on the name of God the Creator; 2) a fundamental belief in equality and the need for social justice; 3) the practice of selflessness and of honest living. • Sikhs also believe that human beings exist in a continual cycle of birth, life and rebirth, and that Karma determines the quality of the cycle. In this there are close similarities with Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.	Gurdwara Guru Granth Sahib	• Bandi Chhor Divas • Birthdates and passing/accession to heaven of the Sikh Gurus • Diwali • Guru Nanak Jayanti • Hola Mohalla • Maghi • Martyrdom of Guru Arjan • Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahador • Sikh New Year • Vaisakhi	• 3HO • Akhand Kirtani Jatha • Namdharis • Nirankari • Radha Soami • Sanatan Sikhs • Amritdhari • Kesdhari • Mona Sikhs • Sahajdhari	524,140 (England and Wales, Census 2021) Around 26 million worldwide (over 24 million in India alone)
Taoism		4th – 3rd Century BCE	• Monotheistic, but in a different way from religions that believe in one, omnipotent God. In Taoism the universe emanates from the Tao (translated as 'The Way'). The Tao can be defined as a natural order from which activity and the workings of the Universe flow and ensue. • Taoism (or Daoism) is closely connected to Chinese culture. • The most important principle of being a Taoist is to live a simple and balanced life, in harmony with the natural world. • Taoists believe in simplicity, patience, compassion and harmony; and in 'going with the flow' and 'letting go'.	Temple Tao Te Ching	• Chinese New Year • Dragon Boat Festival • Ghost Festival • Laba Festival • Lantern Festival • Mid-Autumn Festival • Tomb Sweeping Day	• Northern Taoism • Southern Taoism • Complete Perfection Taoism • Orthodox Unity Taoism • Chen ta • Chin tan • Ch'ing wei • Shen Hsiao • T'ai i • T'ien hsin • T'ung-ch'u	Global estimates range from 12 million to 173 million (World Atlas)

Unitarianism		1560s CE	• Monotheistic. Unitarianism is a Christian movement that believes, however, that God is one and not a holy trinity. • Unitarianism encourages both personal freedom and equality for all. In essence, that people have the right to think for themselves and come to their own conclusions. • Unitarians welcome the contribution of science, the arts and everyday living (as well as faith) to the way people see the world. The earth and the natural system are revered as part of this. • Beliefs and principles are based on reason, experience and individual determination. Beliefs can change as a result of new knowledge and insight.	Church / Chapel See the value of all sacred texts	• Chalica • Holy days in other traditions • Secular holidays	None	7,000 (Great Britain and Ireland) About 800,000 worldwide
Zoroastrian		1000 BCE	• Monotheistic. Zoroastrians believe in one God and Creator whom they call Ahura Mazda ('Wise Lord'). The truth of Ahura Mazda was revealed by the Prophet Zoroaster. • Zoroastrians believe in the purity of the elements and that fire represents the wisdom and light of God. They are not fire worshippers, as is commonly and mistakenly believed. • Zoroastrians believe that the purpose of life is to become a master of 'Asha' (the life force that emanates from Ahura Mazda). There is therefore a belief in spreading goodness and happiness (good thoughts, words and deeds), in giving to charity and in recognising equality of the genders.	Fire Temple Avesta (Zend-avesta)	• 10 Days of Frawardigan • 15 name-day feasts • Gahanbars (seasonal festivals) • Khordad Sal • Mihragan • Nouruz • Pateti • Sadeh • Tiragan • Zartosht No-Diso	• Gabars • Parsis • Conservative Irani • Conservative Parsi • Gatha Only • Modernists • Orthodox	4,000 (UK) An estimated 100,000 to 200,000 across the world (mostly in India and Iran)

Sources of Information

- Census 2021
- Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust: ‘Cultural Awareness Guide and Toolkit’
- Symbols (Aliexpress.com, Amazon, Pinterest, Pixabay.com, Wikipedia)
- Various sources relating to each religious and faith tradition, including Wikipedia, World Atlas, BBC Religion and ReligionFact